

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MARQUE

MANIAC

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HIGH TENSION RE-ENVISION A
GRINDHOUSE NASTY

134 MAY 2009 \$5.99



AMERICAN MARY
THE SOSKA TWINS' FEMINIST BODY
HORROR NIGHTMARE **PLUS!** STAR
KATHERINE ISABELLE INTERVIEWED

THE
DUDE DESIGNS
AMAZING GENRE MOVIE
POSTER MAYHEM

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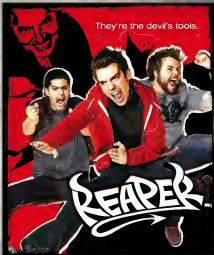
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POST MORTEM

COMMENTARY • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



GRUENORQUE'S MAY 2013 British Horror Movie looks is brilliant! Frantically reading it from start to finish. They never disappoint!

@THACKERMASSIER, VIA TWITTER

IT HAD BEEN A WHILE since I picked up a copy of *Rue Morgue*. Being a diehard *Evil Dead* fan, I couldn't resist the cover of *RM* 732 and had to buy the magazine again. While I enjoyed all the coverage for the new movie what really stood out to me was the editorial on remakes. Kudos to Dave Alexander and the staff for keeping an open mind as regards to reworking a classic. Never understood all the hate people have for remakes. There are numerous examples of updated classics that live up to the original and I'm happy to have *Evil Dead* added to the list. Seen the new one twice now and love it! For one look forward to the future of the franchise!

REMY NELSON — OSHAWA, ONTARIO

JUST GOT THE new Rue Morgue and going to see the new *Evil Dead* tonight — 'tis a bloody wonderful day for Remakeheads!

REVENANTEX, VIA FACEBOOK

DEAR ASIE MORRIS editors, has anyone ever told you, "Oh, you have to meet [Person X], you guys are so much alike!" Sometimes, they are so right on. I was introduced to my new friend Zib through a mutual friend who even we could be separated at both based on our end line, mental arts proficiency and love of heavy metal music and horror movies. We also recently discovered that these two-like elements extend to our inseparable relationship with our navy blue Zampini backpacks. On one recent meeting, we discovered that what's inside the backpacks was the same as well!

SHAGHRIHAN AND ZAR



HELLO, POST MORTEM, the only thing I don't agree on is that "keens don't buy or read mag's", apart from that the nineteen-year-old agrees totally with Richard B's letter (in *RM* 732). Rue Morgue is better without Gary calling the art shots and reviews that last drew previous

featured articles, and Dave Grimsick's art is fantastic. Pechos does seem to favour small comic houses and seems harsh on Marvel's spectacular horror canon. The essentials of Simon Garth, Jack Russell and Alan Morgan easily the best horror comics ever made.

SALLIE136 — AUSTRALIA

GOT THE NEW issue in the mail today! I noticed you were giving away Rakus and Netflix subscriptions to new subscribers. I guess it goes without saying you will be covering Hemlock Grove in the magazine?

ANDREW ROOTE, VIA FACEBOOK

[Turn to page 40 for our look at Hemlock Grove. — Ed]

YOU MAY HAVE OUTGONE yourselves with *RM* 732. A stark dusk from start to finish, from David's "quit feasting out about the remakes" Note from underground to Moritz's outstanding coverage of the new *Evil Dead* (of which I'm a big fan, for the record) to the Rue Crier's fall-battered rundown of the latest Screen's Fantasy re-releases to Meener's terrific article about *Wolfsburg*. I knew of it but knew nothing about it, so thanks for the great intel! (Conan's double whack-pack at it in *Search of...* and the underrated *The Name of the Game* at *K&L*, followed by *Iron*! Benoit's leisure celebration of *Attack of the Beast Creatures* — a long-time personal favourite — alongside *Ta's Worst Movie* profile made for the perfect closing courses. Then your Classic Cat selection of *The Auran Film Encyclopedia* Honor really sealed the deal. In the pre-internet days, as Dean aptly points out, there were a few select horror guidebooks that acted as my sole confident whenever I caught up with a rare fright flick no one else in my personal circle had seen. But *Moody's* invaluable tome, alongside John Stanley's *Concise Features* and Michael Weldon's *Psychomatic Encyclopedia*, are true and trusted companions to this day that I still crack open to see what the cool cats thought of some random passing classic.

AARON "DR AC" CHRISTENSEN — CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DEAR @RUEMORQUE Editor-in-Chief Dave Alexander. I too suffer from Phlegma (*RM* 732). @Phantasm

@WAKLEGG, VIA TWITTER

I JUST GOT my issue, thanks BTW, and I was wondering, what days do you post now "Expiring Minds" questions? I've only seen two "Movie title mash-up" and "Racism-mocking horror literature", never saw the "Scariest dream" or "Slaughtered Lamb vs Winchester Pub" ones.

JOSEPH DZIMCLOWCZ, VIA FACEBOOK

[We post these on an irregular basis on the Rue Morgue Facebook pages. Look forward to you joining the conversation. — Ed]



Which of *Ray Harryhausen's* misunderstood creatures is your favourite, and why?

THE YEAR He was so very misunderstood, through no fault of his own. He simply decided to be left alone.

TERRY WARDEN

I'm a sucker for the giant crab from *Mystic Blue Island*, because it would be delicious.

CHANDRICKS

Medusa terrified me as a kid, and at the same time I loved when Frank the Pug Harryhausen gave each of his creatures life and warmth. I am inclined to avoid referring to them as monsters.

STEPHEN BARNES

The squabbling *swimmers* in *Jaws* and the *Aporos* because they were still human.

ANDREW MULLA

Just about every non-human in *Them*; I wanted to be like Medusa and wanted to see the Kraken up close cause it had killer abs and possibly a belly button which suggests a back story that still fascinates to this day.

EVERETT GAT

What? Are you kidding me? That's like someone asking you which one of your children is your favourite.

WENFAY RAO



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Deadlines

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS — HORROR HAPPENINGS

GREAT HORROR CAMPOUT PITS CAMPERS AGAINST MONSTERS, MANIACS

Genre enthusiasts know that there are established rules for staying alive through the night when there's a masked lunatic with a blade after you. Now horror fans have the chance to test their slasher-survival skills at the inaugural Great Horror Campout—a twelve-hour open-air adventure, taking place at the Los Angeles State Historic Park from June 7 to June 8. Part sleepover, part live play, the Campout is a fully interactive experience complete with monsters, sacrificial rites and vengeful maniacs out for blood.

The Campout is the creation of Melissa Carbone, president and founder of horror entertainment company Ten Thirty One Productions—the stuff behind Los Angeles' popular Haunted Hayride Halloween attraction. The Great Horror Campout, she says, was born out of her love of '80s slasher movies—especially the *Freddy* the 73th series—and the success of the Haunted Hayride, a seasonal attraction that took the haunted-house concept to the next level, with side-shows, a dark maze and, of course, the spooky wagon ride itself.

"People loved it," says Carbone. "People loved the environment and being in the woods. So we decided that we were going to superize that idea, and not just put them in the woods for twenty minutes, but we're gonna put them in tents, make them sleep outside for twelve hours and torture them."

She's only partly kidding. Campers are warned that the actors playing the monsters and maniacs will not only be able to touch them during the event, but will be actively looking to torment them.

"The whole point of this event is to be completely immersive," explains Carbone. "When you go to a haunted house or you go to a Halloween attraction, you have that peace of mind of knowing 'Well, the actors can't touch me.'"



The Great Horror Campout: Participants are forced into a real-life slasher movie.

With this experience, you can actually get begged, you can get bound, you can get moved into tight, claustrophobia-inducing areas—it's really scary."

Carbone is quick to emphasize that, of course, nobody will actually get hurt. However, the most intense experience on offer will be the chance to participate in the "Hell Hunt"—a ghoulish scavenger hunt that will have campers searching for severed heads and extracted teeth, participating in a voodoo drum ceremony, and encountering a range of gruesome monsters. Carbone also notes that those who want to have a hope of "surviving" will need to keep their wits about them, as the nature of the hunt can shift without warning.

"The first rule is that we can change the rules—when we want, for any reason we want, and without notice," she says. "Campers will need to be listening for the Camp Headmasters' announcements for rule changes if they plan on

escaping elimination from the Hell Hunt."

More nervous—or traumatized—campers have other options: the organizers plan to show a selection of forthcoming horror movies at a bonfire in the "Safe Zone" (the program was yet to be finalized at the time of writing). But be warned: if you sneak off to your tent and try to get your head down for a good 48 weeks, you're fair game.

"Even the campers who want to stay in their tents with friends or hang at the bonfire for movies will get scared, just not as scared as those who think they're tough enough for the Hell Hunt," Carbone elaborates. "By the end of the Hell Hunt, if you've been participating, you should be running to the flagpole with your fingernails bloody, muddy, dirty and tired."

Tickets for the Great Horror Campout are \$149 and are available at greathorrencampout.com

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DAUGHTER OF FAMED GHOST HUNTER REVIVES FATHER'S LEGACY

Given the trendiness of current television shows such as *Ghost Hunters* and *Paranormal State*, it might be surprising to learn that celebrity ghost hunters have been part of American pop culture for more than half a century. In fact, June 17 marks the 50th anniversary of noted paranormal investigator Hans Holzer's book *Ghost Hunter*, considered one of the seminal tomes on paranormal research. Holzer's daughter, Alexandra Holzer, has followed in her father's footsteps, and is ready to mark the occasion.

"We should celebrate everybody's life that did good, and celebrate the folklore of the world. My father was that in the spiritual movement in the '50s," she says. "Not enough people know *Ghost Hunter* was the gimmick [book] to open up doors for people to come together and talk about the topic of ghosts comfortably. It's tough because you get people who just don't get it, or people who don't care about the man that made it cool. It's time for people to recognize Hans Holzer for his contributions to the field."

Holzer, also known as the Father of the Paranormal, wrote more than 140 books on hauntings, reincarnation, witchcraft and other supernatural subjects. Besides the acclaimed *Ghost Hunter*, he's most noted for his work on the notorious murder house in Amityville, New York, where he conducted extensive research with medium Ethel Johansen-Meyers. He also wrote several books on the subject, both fiction and nonfiction; in 1979 he penned *Murder in Amityville*, which spawned the film *Amityville 4: The Possession* (1982).

Holzer, who died in 2008 at age 89, produced findings that proved pivotal in the field. His research lent the subject a credibility that hadn't existed before, shaping how hauntings and other supernatural phenomena are investigated today.

"There was no protocol back then," says Alexandra. "Sure, you had people before him like [British paranormal researcher] Harry Price, but they were not modernized the way he was. He was the hip version of what went before him. What he did differently was add psychics into the mix—he did science plus metaphysics. How do you investigate case work when there isn't anything out there that really shows you how? That was really his own thing. He created that."

She points out that *Ghost Hunter*'s semi-centennial is not only a good opportunity to remind people of the work her father did, but also a perfect chance to carry on his work in her own unique way. Alexandra is doing a series of public speaking presentations throughout the year and is even developing her own paranormal reality-TV series—a show that will feature a feminist spin on the popular genre.

"We are trying to get networks to understand that it's okay to have a woman lead a paranormal genre-themed show," she explains. "It's mostly men, there are very few women, and if there is a



Hans Holzer with his seminal book, and grieving daughter Alexandra with her father

woman, she's the psychic. I'm a ghost buster! My father was a man and was the *Ghost Hunter*, I'd like to fill that role as a woman."

Actually, Alexandra might fill both of those roles, as she claims to have inherited her dad's ability to communicate with the dead.

"We consider ourselves a real-life Addams Family," she says. "My mother has her own haunted legacy, she's related to Catherine the Great, and her father was the court of Russia.... My oldest, she's fourteen, knows she's psychic, I wasn't afforded that comfort growing up."

Alexandra even claims that she's been contacted by her father from "the other side," most significantly just days after he passed.

"He comes back as the *Ghost Hunter* to tell his daughter, 'I'm not haunting you, dear, I'm showing you I've arrived.' It was a very pivotal moment in my career.... He's there and he's working with me from the other side, but only when I open up to it."

For updates on Alexandra's work, visit alexandraholzer.com



CHARLOTTE STEAR

ECO-FRIENDLY FOUND-FOOTAGE *ONE* PUSHES BOUNDARIES OF INDIAN HORROR



First-time director Parthab Mohan has not only made an independent, found-footage horror film in India—a country known for its epic dramas and musicals—but has taken a pledge to go green with the film's production.

"We genuinely believe in doing one's share to save the planet," explains Mohan. "Hence, we have decided to abstain from printing film posters for *One*. Further, we have tried to minimize the use of paper during the pre-production and shooting stages of *One* as well."

The movie is among a growing crop of found-footage horror projects

in Malaysian cinema, which takes its name from the language in which it's shot and mainly consists of films produced in Kerala, a state in south-west India. According to an article published online for *The Hindu*, an Indian national newspaper, Malaysian cinema has recently seen as upswing in production with a new wave of experimental films that buck many of the trends set by their more expensive Bollywood counterparts. Malaysian films tend to have lower budgets, less established actors and unconventional, socially conscious narratives. For example, *One* features improvised dialogue, with the actors using their real names in an effort to give the movie a more realistic feel.

According to a press release, *One*, which takes place over the course of a single weekend, is about "a journey that takes a group of friends to a strange place where a supernatural entity lurks, waiting to unleash evil upon its hapless victims."

Despite being shot mostly in Marikakurum Palace in the small town of Pothanode, which lies in Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala, *One* is based on a supposedly real-life Scottish horror story.

"The inspiration behind the choice of subject was an incident that reportedly took place in Scotland in 2004, wherein a group of five college students went on a hiking trip and never returned," says producer/writer Arjun Mohan.

In keeping with the filmmakers' "going green" pledge, promotion for the film will be done primarily through digital means, using Facebook, Twitter and other social media. You can see their digital poster on YouTube by searching OneTheCinema, along with the music video for the movie, with lyrics written by the director.

PATRICK BOLAN

ENTRAILS

Special effects legend Ray Harryhausen died on Tuesday, May 7, in London, at age 92. Harryhausen pio-



neered the stop-motion animation techniques that brought many of the genre's most memorable monsters to life in films such as *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, *Jason and the Argonauts* and *Clash of the Titans*.

He also co-wrote half a dozen books on film, fantasy and his own life, and continued to produce projects well into his 80s.

Former *Walking Dead* scribe Glen Mazzara has been hired by Warner Bros. to write the script for their prequel to *The Shining*. The movie, currently titled *The Overlook Hotel*, is not canonized to Stephen King's upcoming book sequel *Doctor Sleep*. Though no director is attached to the film, *Deadline* has reported Zieff producers Bradley Fischer and James Vanderbilt, along with *Shutter Island*

producer Laeta Kalogridis, are on board to produce the feature.

Dynamite Entertainment has announced *Cassie*, the star of their hit comic *Hack/Slash*, is set to cross over with *Ash* from *Army of Darkness* in a whole new series. *Army of Darkness Vs. Hack/Slash #1* will be written by *Hack/Slash* creator Tim Seeley and will feature covers by Seeley, his *Hack/Slash* co-creator Stefano Casella, the acclaimed artist Ben Templesmith, and a special cover by Chris Eliopoulos. The first issue will be available in July.

A new survival horror game, *The Evil Within*, has been announced by Skynet publisher Bethesda. The company will be working with Resident Evil creator Shinji Mikami on the game, which follows Detective Sebastian, who is called in to investigate a homicide at an inner-city asylum. In an interview with IGN, Mikami said,

"Survival horror has been drifting away from what makes it survival horror. And so I want to bring it back." The game will be available on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, PC and next-generation consoles in 2014.

Topps will release a new series of *Mars Attacks* trading cards this October. Series editor David Waldbeck said in a press release, "Topps hasn't done a set like this in more than twenty years, it's a return to the days when trading cards hooked audiences with incredible imagery and imaginative storytelling. We've loaded the set with everything fans know and love about *Mars Attacks*: giant insects, flying saucers, ray guns, robots, damsels and death rays!"

Special effects master Marcel Vermeulen has died at the age of 87. Vermeulen is most famous for creating the life-size animatronic robot for the possessed Regan in *The Exorcist*. He passed away April 13 at his home in Burbank due to complications from dementia. As well as working on *The Exorcist*, Vermeulen also created special effects for *Deliverance*, *Night Moves* and the TV series *Savage*.

MONSTRO BIZARRO

According to *The Desert Sun*, a strange "cat meeting" in Palm Springs, California, recently evoked mentions of the legendary characters. It all started when a man discovered that the front section of his BMW 321i was "shredded and soaked with what looked like fresh meat." After discovering "large sandy paw prints" on his front lawn, the owner was told that a neighbor had spotted two large animals "loitering through the neighborhood in the wee hours." At that point, the owner summoned police who, in an official report, could only attribute the incident to "hoax-close circumstances." Subsequent conversations with other locals recalled more bizarre tales of "odd coyote-like creatures loitering out of the desert to wreak havoc after sundown," which led some to conclude that the car damage was the work of a chupacabra (an alleged dog-like beast said to roam the arid lands of the Southwest).

BYLE BLACKBURN
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KATHARINE ISABELLE

AMERICAN MARY

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I HAVE EVER SEEN."

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► FUTURE SHOP



CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

ISSUE NO. 134

New Zealand recently added the name "Luccifer" to its national list of banned baby names. It joins such royal monikers as "Damon," "Vince" and "Prince."

The first *Real Desperate* (2000) film was born out of an existing idea for an X-Files TV episode.

Earlier this year, customers in a California Home Depot outlet watched in horror as a man in his forties plucked a pair of socks off of one of the store's shelves and attempted to cut off both of his arms.

Ellie Lanchester was only 5'4", so for her role as the bride of Frankenstein she walked or slithered that made her 7' tall. Additionally, the bandages she wore were so constrictive that she had to be carried around the studio.

Henry II was the first British king to put the corpses of executed criminals on public display as deterrents.

John Carpenter mimed two characters in 1979's *Halloween* after characters in Alfred Hitchcock films: Tommy Doyle (from 1954's *Rear Window*) and Sam Loomis (from 1960's *Psycho*).

In April, a Saudi Arabian court passed a ruling that a 24-year-old man was to be surgically penilectomized for stabbing and penilectomizing a childhood friend ten years earlier when they'd both been juveniles.

Before shooting started on the *Amityville Horror* remake in 2004, the body of a murdered fisherman washed up on the bank of the river, right near the main house.

North Carolina resident Carolyn Watkins died in a car crash this Easter. Somehow her body was completely overlooked by the trooper who discovered the car in a ditch and called for the tow; it was found crumpled over in the front seat several days later when Watkins' family filed a missing persons report.

"Dracula," the cost in the movie adaptation of Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* (1989) was played by seven different babies.

A fifteen-year-old transient who stole a semi in California earlier this year and took it on a joyride that left four people in the hospital told police that he believed "zombies" were chasing him and clinging to the truck.

MTV's *DuckDuckGo* was cancelled back in mid-April after one of the show's cast members died performing just the kind of stunt that had been glorified in the series. Shaun Gossler and two friends succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning after their SUV got stuck in the mud while off-roading.

The earliest form of capital punishment on record in England dates back to 450 BC and involves being executed by being tossed into a quagmire.

COMPILED BY DANIELA C. MCKENZIE AND VANESSA PAPERNO
FOR A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT SEND IT TO: JEFF@WEIRDCORONER.COM



BODY HORROR

THE WOLF MAN
ACTRESS: Marshall Lynn Brown (marshallbrown.com)

4 "I'm especially fond of classic movie monsters, so when my friend—and future partner—Andrea came by with a book of Basil Gogos art under his arm, wanting to do a horror-themed session...to me it was instant. It's an understatement: *The Wolf Man* [portion] was completed in approximately five to five hours...I tried to stay true to the master's dramatic painting style of bold colors and contrast, often showing teeth, brash strokes in the background."

WITH A KISS, MURDER, CAT SLASHES & MORE BY: JEFF@WEIRDCORONER.COM

THE FIMBORGUE SICK TOP SIX MANNEQUIN MADNESS



1. **SILENT HILL 2**
ARTIFICIAL LIMB ARACHNID
2. **TOURIST TRAP**
MADE INTO MURDERHOLLS
3. **MANIAC (1980)**
RIPPED APART BY ANGRY ANIMALS
4. **THE FUNHOUSE**
KILLER CARNIVAL FREDS
5. **MANIAC (2013)**
SICKLY SCALP STANDS
6. **SPASMO**
SCHIZOPHRENIA'S FEMALE FORMS



TORTURED TROGLINES
TWO THOUSAND MANIACS (1994)
AN ENTIRE TOWN BATHED IN PULSING BL BLOOD MADNESS CRAZED FOR CANNIBALITY

NECROPOLICOMICS BY JAY P. FOSGITT



"DON'T BE EMBARRASSED. IT HAPPENS TO EVERY GUY SOONER OR LATER."

See more of Jay's work at jayspageofhorror.com

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...that includes the essence of the gift of a woman's youth as "before the moment" a before moment that enables the essence of the gift of a woman's youth as "before the moment" to exist in itself, not as a moment of time.

Metalab



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10/15/2011 12:28:54

www.merck.com/medwatch

2004年12月11日



NEEDFUL THINGS



1 CHILD'S OWN MONSTERS

\$90-\$140

Bring the monsters under your kid's bed to life! Wendy Tsao transforms children's sketches of strange beasts into real-life toy "bobbies," made of fabric. All her work is custom; the website's gallery showcases her fantastic critters, along with the sketches that inspired them.

Build a beastyman at childsofmonsters.com.

2 A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET TOASTER

\$64.95

There's a certain irony in the possibility of surviving the nightmare world of Freddy Krueger only to have the claw-wielding killer pop up at the breakfast table. This toaster sends an image of Krueger—complete with glove—into your toast of choice. Get fired on your bread at urban-society.com.

3 MISFITS PLATFORMS

\$65

Stalk among us is a pair of these platform: peep-toe shoes, featuring the Misfits' iconic Crimson Ghost. The heel clicks in at a howling howl and a half inches—warn yourself on subway grates and in reach pits, so they don't find pieces of you scattered on the ground. All heel breaks loose at sempussclothing.com.

4 DEXTER BLOOD SLIDE COASTERS

\$29.99

Start your own treasure box with this set of six coasters inspired by TV's *Dexter*. The glass "slides" feature a variety of blood-splatter patterns, and will help keep arterial spray off your coffee table.

Drink with your Dark Passenger at thinkgeek.com.

1



2



3



3



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES; DEXTER: CBS; COASTERS: THINKGEEK

CRYPTIC
COLLECTIBLES

ALIEN 18" ACTION FIGURE

(Kaneer, 1979)

One of the first mainstream toys to be based upon an R-rated film, Kaneer's 18-inch figure of the xenomorph from Ridley Scott's 1979 classic is also one of the most iconic xenomorph toys ever produced. Featuring retractable jaws, a bendable tail, spring-loaded arms and a glow-in-the-dark skull, the figure was nearly the scariest toy re-

leased up to that point, which may explain why it languished on store's clearance shelves. In the years since, it has become a much sought-after collectible, commanding hundreds of dollars on eBay, when complete with its original box and poster/instruction sheet.

JAMES BOWELL

WWW.CRYPTICCOLLECTIBLES.COM



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Synapse-Films.com



A woman with long, wavy brown hair and dramatic eye makeup. Red paint or blood is dripping down her face from her forehead and temples. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. She is wearing a dark, patterned top.

FRANK MIALOUIN, DIRECTOR OF THE MANIAC REMAKE, EXPLAINS WHY HE AND THE REST OF THE TEAM BEHIND FRENCH GORE SHOCKER HIGH TENSION TOOK ON THE NASTIEST GRINDHOUSE MOVIE EVER MADE

MOTHER MADE ME

BY THE GORE-MET

WILLIAM LUSTIG'S GRIMY 1980 SLASHER PROTOTYPE MANIAC IS THE DEFINITIVE EXAMPLE OF GRINDHOUSE CINEMA.

Star Joe Spinell, a character actor with notable appearances in such highly regarded films as *The Godfather* (1972), *Rocky* (1976), and *Run DMC* (1984), conceived, co-scripted, executive-produced *Maniac* specifically for the new-replica style of rundown theaters on 42nd St. in New York City.

The film is a disturbing chronicle of the downward spiral of Keith Zerk, portrayed by Spinell as a self-loathing sociopath tormented by memories of the abuse he suffered at the hands of his sexually promiscuous, dearly departed mother. Zerk wages a one-man holocaust on women he witnesses as accomplices of her—prostitutes, club girls, night-shift nurses and fashion models. After brutally murdering, dismembering or strapping his victims, he takes their skulls to adorn the heads of the department store mannequins that populate his apartment. In his twisted pursuit, the woman—or, rather, his mother—can never “go out” again. A chaotic encounter in a busy park with Anna (Gretchen McLeod), a beautiful fashion photographer,

finds Frank with hope for love, but his descent into madness is inescapable.

Tom Savini's gore affects engendered his enduring controversy. *Maniac* has caused such a stir that the grindhouse crowd, sadly overshadowing Spinell's calculatedly sympathetic portrait of an urban psychotic. Beyond the gore quotient, *Maniac* has been criticized for the originality of the relationship between Anna and Frank, in particular a scene in which Frank takes Anna out to dinner (Lustig removed it for the *E! Entertainment* love-disc releases, but restored it for subsequent DVD and Blu-ray editions).

Before his sudden death in 1988, Spinell was working with Cinematographer Buddy Dwyer on a



Eyes Of The Dragon: Josh Wood as Frank holds sword, and (above) Anna (Anna Arndt) with her camera

quest, Menace II Man: Abbas, but his death effectively ended the Menace saga, and producer Thomas Langmann acquired the rights to remake the film and approached right Menace director Alexandre Aja to helm it. Aja and writing partner Gregory Lessanova produced a script, but Aja declined directing it in honor of American filmmaker Frank Khalloun, who had directed Aja and Lessanova's *P2* (2007).

Remakes have long been contentious among horror fans, given that most of them have been little more than cynical cash-ins. However, Aja made two that were well-received: *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006) and *Piranha* (2010). Like very successful remakes, these films work because they're true to the spirit of the original, while also restating the decades-old stories for modern audiences. In *The Hills Have Eyes*, for example, Aja took advantage of advances in makeup and special effects to make Wes Craven's mutated nuclear family decidedly more horrific.

That same sense of revivification pervades the Menace remake. Khalloun made the decision to not only update the original movie, but the slasher genre in general, by shooting almost the entire film from the perspective of Frank. The audience isn't merely drawn to the character through a compelling performance; it is Joe Spinel's brown hair in the original, we literally inhabit him.

Khalloun also made the seemingly odd choice of casting Björn Wood (see p. 20), best known as Frodo Baggins in the blockbuster *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, as Frank. Part of Spinel's onscreen menace was his physical presence—his bulky body, his long, unimpaired face, his nose scars, all created in a perpetual stream of sweat. Wood is dark-skinned and doe-eyed, almost fragile, which actually gives his violent outbursts added impact.

More importantly, the choice of Wood as Frank ironed out the dispassionability of his relationship with Anna, the crux of both films. In this version, Anna (who is wonderfully played by French actress Nora Arndt) is a photographer who specializes in photographing murderers. Frank was slightly rewritten too: now he's a ruthless vintage analogist. They meet when the stumbles across his shop, and their relationship grows when she sees some of his photographs in an exhibition of her photography. But, as in the original, Frank's deteriorating mental state leads to a violent climax.

"The violence in this new adaptation is just as intense as in the original (which frankly seems almost quaint now after a decade of ultraviolent films classified as "horror porn"), except that it's not presented as a selling point. Make no mistake, there are crime-festering moments throughout the film—knives are stabbed into throats, skulls ripped off, cleavers smashed into faces, and the finale is especially

gruesome—they're just not showcased as they were in Lustig's version.

Ultimately, this is a remake (in limited release June 21, from FOCUS Features) that will satisfy fans old and new, as the spirit of Spinel flows through it. But Menace speaks with Khalloun about subverting a genrehouse cliché for today's cadre of desensitized cinegoers.

Menace is one of my all-time favorite horror movies. I first saw it 25 years ago. When I read about the remake, I was skeptical...

Of course, like everybody else. They were outgunning me!

Certainly I was still in the toughest part of your film, but I was very impressed. You updated and re-purposed the story instead of slapping together a shoddy imitation of it to sell on the goodwill the title has.

That's what remakes have been: producers trying to cash in as a trend. They're not real fans, it seems to me, the producers who are doing this, and they don't take the time to think about how to convey the essence of the film to a new audience. For me, the most shocking thing in Lustig's film was the performance Spinel put in, and that I had so much empathy for this really strange character. That was the key for me—to create a film that completely connects with the character and makes you feel bad for him in the way that I did for Spinel.

He's a real person you empathize with even though he's doing these horrible things.

When Aja and I were talking about the best way to handle the script he and Greg handed me, we worked our brains as how to create that time to bring the audience in close. And how to do it knowing you, and the other audience members who are out there, are not only just genre fans but people who love movies. We know in essence if we made a cool film that stood on its own, it would be respected. That's where the POV started coming from. How do we do something that is innovative or that's never been totally done in the horror genre? When we started talking about POV, it rattled us off of *Peeping Tom* and the early horror movies. It fit, like coming back to where it started. Some of the scariest moments in horror films were the peeping from behind the bath screens, and then we thought that today's audiences—because of first-person shooters, and the found-footage stuff, and all that—we all have camera phones—see ready to accept a film shot entirely like this. The timing was right to attempt a film in this manner.





Not Of Saviors: Spacey and a bloody '94 masterpiece slip disc

That was definitely a bold move. How difficult was it to create that concept?

We knew it would be difficult to sustain if we didn't figure out ways of changing it up for the audience. Here I was talking about empathy and that we have to love this character, and we make a decision to shoot the entire thing from his point of view where now we don't see his character. That's the tough part: how do we start looking for this guy if we don't see him? Then came the flashbacks and the dreams — and the reflections were more important. The reflections make you want to see him more, it starts glowing into the idea of how you feel about this guy because you miss him. We don't realize that you're looking for him throughout the picture. A lot of serial killers talk about these out-of-body experiences and a light bulb went off. That would be a perfect way to see our character as well. The POV just sustained throughout the entire movie, but it's justified within our context.

How did you become involved initially?

Spenser [Alex] called me and said Thomas Lundgren was a real big fan of the original and had the rights for a long time but didn't know what to do with it. He and George had a script and he asked me if I was interested in going to it. I was interested, but I didn't want to do a straight-up sequel or something that's been done. He was asking me to do the one movie that's been copied in every single horror movie, and now he just asking

me to actually copy the movie. There was no way we could do this except to go left and figure out how to do something completely new, because at least people could think we had something new instead of recycling us of trying to see a trend to make some money. I'm still early in my career and I need to keep trying to push the envelope and do something different. This was the opportunity for that. Work is work, I want to be involved with these guys because they're very talented, so already I wanted to say yes, it could be something fresh. So then I took the script and rewrote for the point of view.

New tough was that to do?

That's a real job. No longer are you on the side of the victim. A big part of being scared, for the audience, is not knowing where the killer is. She doesn't know, you don't know, critics don't know and you know, but you're always on the side of the victim. [With this] it becomes a different type of fear. It's not your usual horror film, where you follow the victim around and wait for the bad guy to jump out at us — or a cat.

Your portrayal of a psychopath rings true. Did you do any research before making the film?
I read about a whole bunch of serial killers. They're all weird in their own way, but they're all unassuming. I found that was really interesting to me, that they're unassuming and nobody ever suspected them of being

WE REALLY HAD TO FIND SOMEONE WHO WAS DISARMING, THAT WAS NOT AS SCARY AND MAYBE INSPIRED SOME TRUST...

FRANCK KHALFOUN

a serial killer, which is why when Spenser's name came up I thought, "Who's the most likely guy to do this kind of story?" Blandy came up for me, because he was charming. Today, if you're going to attract women into your world, you've got to have some charm. We started with more Joe Spenser-type where we started to cast the movie, but women are more sophisticated now, and audiences are more sophisticated. They're more critical. We really had to find someone who was disarming, that was not as scary, [but] maybe inspired some trust, and had this cool sort of sexy vibe to him. [Spenser] was great for that.

It seems rather daring for an A-list actor to take on a role like this.

He's a big guy, he'll be loves horror movies. He knows more about horror movies than I do, I think. Because of his association with *Lord of the Rings*, he's been to every fantastic film festival for years now. He's really gotten to learn, and to see, and to know the genre and everybody in it. He was a big fan, and then conceptually, the idea that we were trying to do something very original and very new and that we were going to do it from his eyes, that told him, I think he was interested because it was daring, he's a daring guy. He's a smart guy. These "W" guys have to do some daring things to be talked about and be involved in cool projects, not just big machines.

What was the rest of the casting process like?

There were women, and I wanted to get as diverse a range of women as I could. From the young to the old, to the wife to the big, beautiful to not so beautiful — although they're all beautiful inside — it was about getting a range of different women. There were a couple of scenes where the women were older that didn't make it just for story and rhythm. We were lucky to have Hoda. She has this wonderful thing where she looks at you and she's so attractive, she really looks deep into

HORROR MOVIE MANIAC
ELIJAH WOOD EXPLAINS WHY
HE TOOK ON THE DARKEST
ROLE OF HIS CAREER

A CUT ABOVE

BY DAVE ALEXANDER



IT'S SIMPLY NOT POSSIBLE TO OUT-CREEP JOE SPINELL AS THE HULKING, SWEATING, LEERING AND PHYSICALLY REPULSIVE FRANK IN THE ORIGINAL MANIAC, which is

why the producers of the remake decided to go in the opposite direction and approach Elijah Wood to play the movie's murderous protagonist. The star of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and other Hollywood films is the anti-Spinell: a slight, wide-eyed, boy-next-door type who doesn't look capable of playing a killer, much less one with severe mommy issues and a penchant for scalps. It seems like outright career suicide for such a leading man to take on such a sick persona. Wood doesn't see it that way at all, however.

"First and foremost I'm a fan of genre cinema," he asserts during a phone interview with *Rolling Stone*. "I'm a huge horror movie fan. But aside from that, just from a character perspective I'm always interested in challenges. I've never really played that kind of character—I mean, Kevin at *San City* is a certain degree, but he had a lot more character work to be done. This character was so much more well drawn... It was interesting because it wasn't a characterisation in a traditional sense. When you've got 90 percent of the character

unseen, the challenge becomes bringing [him] to life. I knew that about 70 percent of the character would be created during the ADR stage, you're mostly hearing him. So I knew it was a character created in a few parts. I was intrigued by that."

Because the film is shot from Frank's POV and he's only seen in reflection in a handful of scenes, Wood was originally supposed to work on the movie for just two weeks. But he soon realized that he needed to be there for almost the entire shoot for both technical reasons ("Every day was a different puzzle piece because you can't rely on traditional coverage for anything," he points out) and because he literally wanted to be hands-on with the role.

"No one on this film had made a really POV movie before," he notes. "As it turned out, it required that I be there all the time and be a part of the collaboration. Initially we thought it would be a double for my hands for any of the shots where I wasn't there, but of course those hands would be making decisions."

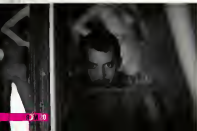
The actor decided to initially entertain the script because of producer/co-writer Alexandre Aja's involvement. He had never seen Bill Lustig's original 1980 greenhouse nasty *Maniac*, and even after he accepted the role he avoided watching it, in order to develop his own version of Frank.

"I didn't actually watch it until we had started production," Wood recalls. "The version of the character we were creating for this was entirely its own. The original film is so extraordinary and iconic that it was never my intent to take more than inspiration [from it]."

He did eventually fall in love with the original *Maniac*, though, and laments the exclusion of one particular scene in this reworking.

"My one regret, actually, is there's a sequence in the original film where Joe Spinell's character shoots a couple with a shotgun, which is kind of incredible. There was an earlier draft of the [remake] screenplay that had that scene and it was cut. I suppose primarily because he typically uses a knife in our film. But I loved that scene; it's so iconic."

Given the actor's affinity for the films of Aja (which include *High Tension*,



Maniac in The Mirror: One of the few times we see Frank's face in the film.

and the *Hills Have Eyes* and *Graveyard Book* re-inked, you gotta wonder if the genial, soft-spoken 32-year-old is just talking up the game for the sake of the interview, or whether he's really a dyed-in-the-wool horror fan. Or perhaps even a closet gore-head?

"I like it [and I sort of hate it]," he says when asked about which horror films got him fired up. "I think there's a quote from Stephen King, where he said, 'To be a fan of horror is to be a fan of total shit,' which is to say, if you're a horror fan, you kind of expect injuries in the genre [while] in search of great films because great horror movies are fewer and farther between. But I like all kinds of horror. I'd say the horror I like the most tends to be based on atmosphere and tone and character rather than relying specifically on gore. But I certainly don't shy away from gory movies. There are certain horror movies that earn their merit just on entertainment value, but my favorite horror movies are the ones that take their subject matter seriously—things like Rosenberg's *Betsy*, *The Thing*, *The Exorcist*, Halloween's one of my favorites, recently, *Let the Right One In*, *The House of the Devil*, *We Are What We Are*."

Wood loves horror so much in fact that he put his money where his mouth is and formed a production company dedicated to making genre films with an international flavor. After meeting his partners, Daniel Noah and Josh C. Waller, a few years ago and realizing that they all shared a mutual love of non-mainstream horror movies, they decided to form The Woodshed.

The company just finished production on its first feature, *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*, by Ana Lily Amirpour. Based on her short of the same name, it's an Iranian horror-western with vampires, shot in black and white, and all in Persia. This past spring the company also went into production on what Wood describes as "probably our most exploitation-esque film," a zombie movie called *Coherence* about a virus outbreak at an isolated scientific school.

"I think the kinds of films we want to see are being more widely made in the European and Asian film markets than they are in the US, although there are some great, shining examples of quality horror films in the US as of late," he says. "I would cite *Insidious* as an example, and *Rescue of the Devil* as a great example. But the films I love the most are predominantly from Europe, from France, Spain, Sweden, even Mexico and South Korea. So our intention is to create really high-quality genre movies that take themselves seriously, that are inspired by the movies we love the most in the genre."

your eyes when you *SR* and she really tries to get as much out of you as she can. I thought that was a really interesting quality for someone who had to look into the camera and act to it directly.

I liked your approach to gore. Obviously, the original is notorious for Sarah's effects, and there are some pretty brutal scenes in your version, but they're not necessarily the focus of it.
No, it's not the focus, and it's not really as gruesome as the original. I feel that, not just in the genre but in filmmaking, when you do everything measured—with subtlety, with violence, with gore—it's more effective. You really have to play into the story and you have to be careful of the psyche of the audience. The key to these movies, and I don't care if you're doing a horror movie, is you have to be engaged with the characters and you have to be engaged with the film—you have to be in the moment. If you do anything that's over the top or too much, it really pulls you out, and I think you lose the effectiveness. If you lose the effectiveness in a horror film, you're either laughing or you're disconnected. My goal was to never disconnect, to really follow the lead and be involved in it because I knew that if the end the horror would really creep up on you. Eventually, in this POV style, you're going to be stuck in the theater and in this body in the same way Frank is stuck in his body. You're going to connect these scenes, connect with him. That's where the empathy comes in, you won't feel bad about what you're doing, you'll feel bad for the person that's doing them. I think the reason that the violence is so effective is that the rest of the movie is so elegant and hypnotizing, so when you juxtapose that with violence it's going to seem that much more brutal.

The look of the film is very different from the original. That was shot on 42nd St. and consequently has a gummy atmosphere, whereas your film is upscale and sterile. That was obviously a conscious decision.

That's today's audience. It's a different world than 30 years ago in New York. That would have been disappointing. This is just another way of connecting to an audience, who are ADHD, I think.

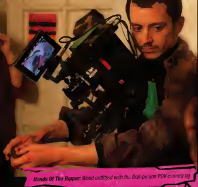
who can't connect unless you drop them in and can't turn them. That's what they're used to. They're all class, they're all on their iPods and iPhones, and they're more sophisticated. Everything's gentrified and cleaned up, look at New York City now. Everything's Disney! That's the world people live in.

The setting of the film is never made clear, but you shot in Los Angeles as opposed to New York. Was there a specific reason for that?

We talked about New York a few script originally, and I mentioned the Lower East Side—the streets are deserted. If you go to the Lower East Side at four in the morning, it's packed with people. That New York does not exist anymore. Where does that exist? I lived in downtown LA for years and I remember it being really hardcore, so I started driving around. There are still the needy parts of Los Angeles, and then two blocks away you're in elegance and money. It's really striking and a very modern thing. Plus it's a beautiful city, but there are these decadent old buildings that have gone to shit. It really mirrors where Frank is. He's stuck in this past, being a child. There's that part of the city where you have incredibly beautiful old build-



I THINK THE REASON THAT THE VIOLENCE IS SO EFFECTIVE IS THAT THE REST OF THE MOVIE IS SO ELEGANT AND HYPNOTIZING... **FRANK KHALFOUN**



Minds of The Puppet: Wan outfitted with the first-person POV camera rig

legs right next to the Disney Center, it mirrors his personality, and it's also aesthetically inspiring. It was another way to reimagine and give it a new feeling.

And yet, [saying] that it is essential to the original is in this, close to small details like the scene in which Frank opens the film attracted by the setting scales.

You want to pay homage and sort of give the audience little reminders, but you also want to make it a new film. It was fun, for example, to write the scene where the girl meets Frank and says, "I didn't imagine you looking like this, I imagined you with long, shaggy hair and a cane" and describes Joe Spinnell. Then there's the recreation of the original poster in the car pool, the reflection of the head and the knife. That was Ajia's idea and it was great!

CO-WRITER AND PRODUCER ALEXANDRE AJIA ON SPEARHEADING THE REMAKE

GUIDING THE KNIFE

BY AARON WILLIAMS

Why remake *Mantec*?

You know, *Mantec* is one of the few movies that really got me into this genre. I remember the first time I saw the cover of the VHS as a kid in the video club, I was so scared. I remember watching it a few years after and being completely sucked into the story. I remember the

suspense, I remember the feel. Joe Spinnell, because that stayed in my nightmares for a long time. When we did *High Tension*, it was really like a big homage, a big tribute to *Mantec*, and we did a whole scene, almost shot by shot, I would have never dared to even touch the original *Mantec* if the idea didn't come directly from [Mantec creator] del Lascio. A few years ago, a French producer was also thinking of this movie and organized a meeting between Bill and myself and we talked about *High Tension* and how it came to be in the vein of the original *Mantec*, by the end of this meeting he felt very confident and said if I was producing this movie with them and [that I would] respect the original.

Why *Eliah Wood as Frank*?

Our version of Frank Zito is more like Anthony Perkins in *Psycho* than Joe Spinnell in the original *Mantec*. He has that kind of dark, charming, polite that would make him believable when he comes to meet a girl and gets in some sort of relationship with her. So we were realizing that it wasn't a girl age that we had to find, but the opposite—someone looking more like Terence Stamp in *The Collector*, with a relaxed, beautiful

When you see the reflection of the poster...

Some people get it and laugh, others go, "What's so funny?" It's a tribute, it plays really well, especially to a core audience of genre people who know the film and love these movies. There's a lot of love in some of these moments, little homages and links to the original, which people really love.

The more it grew, it's reminiscent of Jay Chikney's score for the original.

Yes, it is. Again, it's a throwback to the '80s and reminds where our character is, kind of slush, and electronic is cool and kids love it today. I thought it was perfect and worked really well. It's a reworking sort of synth track, it's atmospheric and it's big and it's creepy. But did a wonderful job with it. He gave me so much music to try 75 percent of it didn't go in. Obviously it's hard to get the score out of a composer, but I had three or four marks from which to pick. It was perfect.

Looking at the list of producers, which includes original *Mantec* producer Andrew Garrett and William Lasty, as well as Ajia, were you at all intimidated, making this film?

It was me and Ajia pretty much making the movie. I'm producing and not directing, so working on the scripts together it was a constant flow of ideas. The other guys respect limitations and financing. They weren't on our backs, they were very supportive and trusted what we were doing. A lot of times I thought it was really strange what we were doing, but they had faith. It's not everyday to make a movie with all the money people looking out on you, but in this case they believed in the project and the script. It's great to have producers who have your back and are willing to take chances, it's not often the case.

Well, you certainly took some risks. Would you say they paid off?

This time around we're getting good reviews, critically it's doing well both without our audience and across the board with people who see the movie. It's one of those rare movies where the few bad critiques that come out are actually better than the good ones because the people who are reviewing it are so hooked out and find it so revealing that the horror has are like, "I've got to see that!" [A lot of people] and these horrible things, they're actually selling it for us!



Alexandre Ajia

face and looks himself like a mannequin. I think Eliah with his big blue eyes — giant eyes — is exactly that! [Laughs] He has that kind of intensity, that kind of cold, obsessive intensity that he brings to the movie, which I think works so well.

How involved was Lasty in the shoot?

He came to view the movie himself and he was on set with us. Also, he asked me, "When did you start shooting?" The first day was the 22nd of November, and he showed me a brilliant Joe Spinnell gave him back in the day and there it was, we signed with the original shooting date of the original *Mantec* — they had

started on the 22nd of November as well!

Why didn't you direct it instead of *French Killers*?

First, I was working on something else that I was going to direct at the time, it was a big space adventure movie and I couldn't disrupt that to direct *Mantec*. I think *French Killers* was a great sense of characters, sense of storytelling and of dark humor. He really believes in these characters, he really wants them to be realistic and so it was really great to make this movie, together I didn't only put my name on it, I was really involved with Frank to make the movie.

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FEMINIST BODY HORROR TAKES A SURGICAL TWIST AT THE HANDS OF JEN AND SYLVIA SOSKA, THE TWIN FILMMAKERS BEHIND *ANATOMY OF A MIND*

BEAUTY AND THE BLOOD

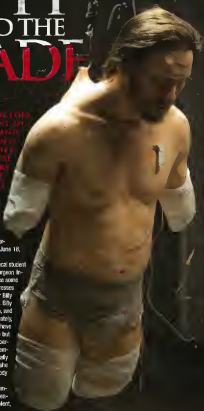
By
CAITLIN
HORSNELL

HORROR IS A CONTRADICTION GENRE IN ITS TREATMENT OF GENDER. ON THE ONE HAND, IT RESISTED TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES BEFORE ANY OTHER GENRE DARED TO DO SO. IN ITS USE OF TOUGH FEMALE CHARACTERS WHO FIGHT BACK WHEN ATTACKED, RATHER THAN WAITING TO BE RESCUED. ON THE OTHER,

It's been excoriated repeatedly for its more exploitative and sexist tropes. One thing is indisputable, though, as a genre that specializes in dealing with those perceived as "other" by the social mainstream, there are almost infinite opportunities for exploring new and original monsters and strong female characters. It's at the intersection of those two concepts that body horror flick *American Mary* (in theatres May 31 and on DVD on June 16, from Anchor Bay) resides.

The Vancouver-shot film tells the story of impoverished medical student Mary Mazon (Katherine Isabelle), who's training to become a surgeon. Increasingly unable to find off her credits, she decides to make some quick and easy money as a stripper; over the professional, she dresses up to the nines for her auditions with sleazy strip-club owner Billy Barker (Antonio Cupo) — but never gets the chance to perform. Billy is called away by a couple of his henchmen during her audition, and when he returns, he offers Mary \$5000 cash, payable immediately, if she'll use her surgical skills to save the life of a guy his thugs have just tortured. Mary takes the money and saves the guy's life but finds herself saddled with a reputation in the underworld for performing surgeries that are unconventional, to say the least. Scurrying, her financial troubles are over; however, when she's sexually assaulted by one of her professors, Dr. Gault (David Levigne), she enters a downward spiral into a world of ever more extreme body modifications and bloody revenge.

American Mary is the creation of Jen and Sylvia Soska, the Vancouver-born twin sisters who debuted in 2007 with their first feature *Dead Hooker in a Trunk*, a grindhouse-inspired, ultraviolent,



road-trip adventures that they developed from a trailer they'd made in film school. *American Mary* is a different kind of film altogether: It's a thought-provoking examination of appearances, gender roles and power in 21st-century America, with a ton of gore and, significantly, a ferociously original female horror, who, says Sylvia Soska, is a hybrid of two familiar slasher tropes.

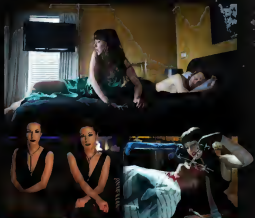
"Jen and I have grown up on horror movies," she says, "and I found a lot of strength in the female characters, especially the 'final girls,' but a lot of the time I find myself rooting for the antagonist — Pinhead and Freddy and Jason and all of these iconic male characters. I remember I was watching a lot of Wes Craven horror films, and a lot of the time the female characters are the girl that gets killed, or very two-dimensional."

The final straw came when Sylvia read an article on Hungary's legendary "blood countess," Elizabeth Bathory. "They were making claims that she couldn't possibly have done the atrocious acts that she did because she was a woman," she says, "and I was, like, 'I'm a woman, I know the crazy that goes through my head sometimes.'" The resulting screenplay features a rounded and nuanced protagonist whose growing eccentricity only adds to the audience's fascination. "[Mary is] flawed and she's very real," says Sylvia, "but at the same time, you would love to throw on that [scarf] again for Halloween and just feel like a total motherfucker."

Academic Carol Clover's mid-'80s conceptualization of iconic slasher survivors such as Halloween's Laurie Strode and Friday the 13th's Alice Hardy as "final girls," of course, marked the horror genre as being ahead of the curve in that, for the first time, a largely male audience was being asked to identify, in the end, with a female protagonist. In a genre that is still, for the most part, dominated by male protagonists, the Soskas have created in Mary Mason a central character who embodies—quite literally—many modern anxieties and tensions, no matter what your gender: economic insecurity, the ever-present spectre of unemployment and, perhaps most centrally to the movie, the persistent and all-pervasive social judgment of people's physical appearances.

"The tagline is 'Appearances are everything,'" says Jen Soska, "and that's a theme throughout, with the way the movie is shot, the way the characters interact with one another. Something that a girl who looks like Kate [Johansson] has in common with a sex-foot tattooed thug or a person that is in the body modification community is that all of us are judged on our appearances before anybody gets to know us. It's something that everybody can relate to on a certain level, but it's something you don't see expressed that much in film."

Sylvia notes that as Mary's life spirals out of con-



Jen and Sylvia Soska (pictured above) Mary wakes up after being drugged, she takes poetic revenge, and the mysterious Damien helps it. In it, Jen and Sylvia Soska ask a bloody body modification.

"JEN AND I HAVE GROWN UP ON HORROR MOVIES, AND I FOUND STRENGTH IN THE FEMALE CHARACTERS, ESPECIALLY THE 'FINAL GIRLS...'"

— Sylvia Soska

trol, her personal appearance just keeps getting better. Many of the scenarios in which Mary finds herself in the movie are situations in which she is clearly perceived as an object on display—the most extreme example being a brutal sexual assault, during which she is filmed by her attacker—but in her everyday life, it's an aspect of her existence that she leans into in order to control.

"[Mary] just puts on a good front: she makes sure her makeup is pretty, she looks perfect, and she doesn't really deal with things," adds Jen. "I know a lot of women like that: as long as you look awesome on the outside, that's kind of like your battle armour; you can take on anything, but on the inside—it's like a duck, you know? You look smooth on the outside but underneath, you're paddling like hell."

The sisters also admit that the issue of controlling image, personal appearance and other people's perceptions is one that frequently seems

more of a minefield for women.

"What's that saying?" asks Jen. "You have to be Barbara Walters in business, Martha Stewart in the kitchen and Jenna Jameson in the bedroom. And dudes don't have that: you wear a fucking nice suit and you're just a dude at work... If you're a chick, there's just so much you have to be, it's just society's unrealistic demands on women, it's just insane. And [you have] to do it all in high heels, I love high heels, but always doing everything in high heels? Crazy."

The subtlety and flawed depth of Mary are perfectly captured in a stellar performance by Canadian scream queen Katherine Isabelle (Binger Snaps).

"She was our only choice," says Sylvia. "As directors and writers, we never write for one particular actor, because you never know if their schedules will work out, or if they're actually the people you assume that they are, or if you'll even get along, or that they'll get it. We thought, worst case scenario, if she didn't want to do it, we would track her down somewhere and corner her and be like, 'Come on, Kate, why don't you just do this?'"



"Because this character is so you." As insane as that sounds, we absolutely would have done that."

Fortunately, they didn't have to: Isabelle received the script while in the mountains of British Columbia, and read it there. She then drove down to meet the sisters in Vancouver, reading the screenplay through twice more on the way.

"We met at a sushi restaurant originally," says Sylvia. "That was going to be our medium ground, to see if we hit it off. By the end of the night we had gone from place to place, closed down three more bars and were trying to downed the last bar put karaoke back on."

"When you're with your actress," adds Jen, "and you're on the street at five in the morning and you're passionately talking about body modification and radical feminism and the sciences, that's when you know you're going to create something special."

The film also speaks to the ravaged US economy: You know things are bad when a qualified and driven A-grade medical student ends up auditioning to become a stripper in order to pay her cell-phone bill. But Jen says that the depiction of living on the edge of poverty actually came from the twins' early experiences working in the States.

"When we wrote the film, we were still trying to sell our first movie, *Dead Hooker in a Trunk*," she says. "We were incredibly poor, we were going to meetings in downtown Los Angeles, we were going to the hospital constantly with one of our ailing family members for long periods of time, and there was all this stuff that we were going through... We couldn't control how hard it is to make enough money, [or] the way people treat each other, so finally, if we put it in [the script], we were in control of it and we could step back and examine these issues that really impact your life."

"It's also called *American Mary* because it's very much about her own sacrifice and her own journey

for her American dream," adds Sylvia.

She notes that American cultural ideals also spoke to much of the interplay in the movie between socially acceptable cosmetic surgery and the stigma that can go along with body modification.

"I think the main difference for us between cosmetic surgery and the body mod community is that with cosmetic surgery, people are largely trying to fit the ideal of what is the accepted form of beauty and that's largely the American ideal of what is beautiful, whereas with body modification, people are really trying to connect to their own ideas of self and beauty."

Curiously, the underground chemists that populate the body mod community and strip clubs in the movie are far more sympathetic than the borderline-psychopathic doctors and surgeons, again and again, the doctors understand that outward appearances can be deceptive, that people deemed "freakish" by conventional American cul-

Katharine Isabelle DISSECTS HER STARRING ROLE AS AN ASPIRING SURGEON WHO'S SO MUCH MORE THAN ANOTHER WOMAN ON THE EDGE

BLOODY, BLOODY MARY IVARY

by CLAIRE HORSNELL

WHEN KATHARINE ISABELLE READ JEN AND SYLVIA SOSKA'S SCRIPT FOR *AMERICAN MARY*, THE STORY OF A YOUNG SURGEON WHO ENTERS THE WORLD OF BODY MODIFICATION AND SUSPENSION, SHE WAS, WELL, HOOKED.

"I ended up reading this when I had 150 pages on my BlackBerry sitting in bed, completely intoxicated with my jaw on the floor," she recalls. "I had never read anything that interesting, that well-written, that original, that stark, that funny, that intriguing, or featuring a female character who you end up falling in love with although she really has no redeeming qualities.... And I don't often gut to see a woman who is so strong and yet a little bit off, a little dark, who can be funny and really lovable but at the same time not really over-acting or being charming at all."

In the vein of Lucky McKee's title character in *May*, Mary is certainly intriguing, although by the end of the film she's a complete monster, she's the kind of monster created by the



turn are as rounded, compassionate and flawed as everyone else, and frequently more self-aware. The body modifications in the movie are not for the faint-hearted, though. Euthesia Johnson (Tristan Risk), one of the strippers at Billy's club, has physically reinvented herself as a real-life version of cartoon sex symbol Betty Boop, while her friend Ruby Ravnigh approaches Mary to ask her to transform her body, as far as possible, into a sexless living Barbie doll, by sliding off her nipples and stitching up and covering her genitalia. The Sokoos themselves play two German sisters who travel from Berlin to have Mary perform some extreme body modification. However, none of this comes close to the horrors enacted on Mary's ripist, Dr. Grant (David Lovgren), when she finally gets him in a room with her surgical equipment.

To realize the ambitious gore effects in the film, the twins enlisted Todd Masters' Mesquite Effects company, which has produced special effects for shows such as *Six Feet Under* and *True Blood*.

"IF YOU'RE A CHICK THERE'S JUST SO MUCH YOU HAVE TO BE, IT'S JUST SOCIETY'S UNREALISTIC DEMANDS ON WOMAN. IT'S JUST INSANE"

— Jon Sooka



world around her, who takes the audience with her on her downward trajectory. She's ultimately a very sympathetic character, and Isabelle points out that both she and Sylvia Sooka share aspects of Mary's personality.

"We're a bit socially awkward," she says, "we're a bit detached, we're probably about two percent sociopathic... [Audiences] don't get to see the kind of female character that Mary is in film or really anywhere."

She points to the very narrow range of female "types" typically offered by Hollywood.

"I hope girls will see this movie, and go, 'You know what, I don't need to be fucking smiley all the time. I don't need to be sweet and charming all the time. People can still like me if I'm being incredibly interesting and very smart and very funny, without having to put on this smiley charming face.'"

Like the Sooka sisters, Isabelle notes that Mary's appearance becomes over more polished as her psychological state deteriorates, as it's one of the few things that her character can control — much like her best-known character, Ginger, from *Ginger Snaps* (2000), who becomes more confident, sexual and dangerous after being bitten by a werewolf. And she points out, the pressure on people, especially women, to maintain a flawless appearance, and the failure of doing so.



"As a young, attractive female, I now have to sell a brand, I have to have a definable style, it's annoying, being a girl is time-consuming and boring and annoying, when it comes down to having to do your fucking hair and your makeup and your outfit and everything. It's suffocatingly dull."

Isabelle says that the most challenging aspect of performing Mary was the film's intense shooting schedule. The whole thing was shot in just fifteen days.

"I was really worried about the mental deterioration of Mary being accurate," she says. "Because I think that was the most important. If that had been off, you wouldn't have been so invested. I was terrified to fuck it up. I didn't want to let the girls down and I didn't want to let the character of Mary down."

But does Isabelle share the Sooka twins' fascination with body modification, which drives the film?

"I'm a bit of a chicken," she admits. "[The Sokoos] said to me on the first day, 'Don't Google "subincision pens," whatever you do,' and of course I immediately Googled it and totally regretted that decision, and got off freaked out."

Her favorite modification?

"I was a big fan of the heart-shaped nipples, but I think it's actually a little weird that because we thought it was really cute."



Mad Squad: Mary prays for surgery, rights consults with Euthesia (Tristan Risk) about some extreme makeover for her girlfriend, (top) is watched by ship club owner Billy Rimmer (Anthony Davis), and (opposite) bloodied but not deliriously unbothered

MARKED THE WOMAN

COMFORTING SKIN

Starring Victoria Beckham, Tygh Runyan and Jane Sowerby
Written and directed by Derek Franzen
Anchor Bay

American Mary isn't the only Vancouver-shot body horror film with a decidedly feminist slant out there right now. *Comforting Skin*, the debut feature film from writer/director Derek Franzen, would make a pretty damn tall with the *Scars* and *Black Swan* features, as it accomplishes much as a low budget with the haunting story of an emotionally vulnerable woman who fights a losing battle with her early through twisted, co-dependent relationship with her own tattoo.

It's no secret that Brooklyn-screaming Kaitie (Victoria Beckham) isn't on great terms with her skin. She hides self-injury scars and acne with flashy clothes and makeup and can't understand why she feels invisible and unwanted. In a last-ditch effort to reclaim her body, she hits up a tattoo parlour and gets a posée design etched onto her shoulder blade, where it'll really forevermore... or so she thinks.

The new tattoo lifts Kaitie's mood temporarily, but when her depressive returns, she turns back to her trusty retractable razor blade, and that's when her ink starts talking to her. She's terrified at first, but soon realizes that the voice is saying exactly what she's been desperate to hear: she's special and won't ever be alone again. Our protagonist and her tattoo go quickly from friends to lovers (yes, they even have "sex"), and as their intimacy deepens, her skin sheds and her scars fade away.

Sadly, Kaitie's autistic bias is only semi-permanent: her tattoo becomes jealous of her friendship with her homophobic best friend/roommate Nathan (Tygh Runyan) and insists on having her undivided attention.

Interestingly, the tattoo doesn't have a problem with her owner getting wasted and fooling around with her agee party girl neighbour Synthia (Jane Sowerby), who envies Kaitie's new sense of confidence. Booze and drugs only loosen an already weak grip on what's real, and it fails to Nathan to make her confront reality.

The fact that *Comforting Skin* can bucke such a story with equal parts grace, humor and abject horror is a feat in itself, and much of the credit is due to Beckham's powerful performance, which makes the idea of a woman in an abusive relationship with her tattoo seem less farfetched than it probably should. Certainly, the talking, crawling ink is intended both as a metaphor for the character's superficiality and a personification of what is likely schizophrenia, but her struggle to reconcile her inner and outer selves is one that can get under anyone's skin.



"Todd Morison, who was a fucking god, came over to us," says Sylva, "and he's like, 'Well, how would you shoot if it wasn't on an issue?' and I was like, 'Well, if money wasn't an issue, I'd have this costume here, and I'd have my one light, and you could see the whole thing and I'd have a big paper [for one of Mary's screams], but in reality, we can't, that would be a third of our budget.'"

Morison suggested that they create storyboards for the scene anyway, ostensibly for marketing purposes; in fact, they already had storyboards that they had reconciled themselves to not using because of budgetary constraints.

"The day comes along," says Sylva, "and all the Masters Effects people are smiling, they're like, 'You have to go upstairs.' So it was like, 'What? What do you mean?' and they're like, 'You guys have to go upstairs, there's something upstairs for you, we got a surprise.' And we go upstairs and there's the whole fucking puppet... it was the biggest thing ever, it was one of the best surprises of my life."

Given American Mary's obsession with body modification, it's impossible to resist taking the *Scars* which of the modifications in the film most fascinates them.

"At one point I wanted to get my tongue split," says Jen, "along with Tristan Risk. One day Russ Fox [the body modification consultant on the movie] came in after having done one, and I didn't realize how much blood there was. I'm a huge fan of blood, but [not] watching my own blood just gushing out of me."

Sylva, though, hones in on the suspension that Mary performs on one of her targets.

"It's so interesting," she says, "because it's kind of mind over matter: it's like extreme meditation where you put yourself in a supremely uncomfortable position and then you kind of transcend your body. I loved it, it was so cool. The mod guys knew that I'm vanilla so can be and I've had nothing done, but I so obsessed over it, they gave me a suspension hook afterwards and they were like, 'When your balls drop, any time you want we'll strap you up.' One of these days, I'm going to get over myself and take the plunge."



Mark of The Beast
American Mary
by Andrew Ross

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OF THE MOST EYE-CATCHING GENRE ART OUT THERE
RIGHT NOW. BUT NOT WITHOUT A FIGHT

The Dude Designs



A
MIND
FOR

MOVIE MAYHEM

BY COLIN MCCrackEN

T

HE DUDE DESIGNS (A.K.A. TOM HODGE) IS PART OF A SADLY ENDANGERED BREED: THAT OF THE VIDEO AND POSTER ARTIST

—at least, formerly endangered. Based on exploitation and horror VHS and dependent on the shoddy aesthetic presentation that great movies have frequently received from distribution companies throughout the DVD years, he took matters (well, brushed) into his own hands, helping to kickstart the current resurgence of exciting original art on genre movie posters. A subscriber to masters of the craft such as Graham Humphreys and Drew Struzan, he rose to prominence thanks to his splashy, trashy collage artwork for Jason Eisener's *Hobo with a Shotgun*. He has subsequently provided stunning video covers and cinema posters for James Decker's *Dear God* (and its forthcoming sequel *Indecent Obscene Deities*), as well as John Carpenter's *They Live* and *El West's* *The Inbetweeners*. We talk to him about his signature style, thoughts on the industry and why we just can't seem to let go of badly Photoshopped movie art.

You have stated that you come from a graphic design background. Did you go through art school, or are you self-taught?

I spent two years at college and three at university doing what they call Visual Communication, but it's really graphic design. I spent my time working on the design elements, as well as [taking] Film Studies. When I was working and studying in the late '90s, video art wasn't regarded as even being close to high-end design. This was when DVDs were starting to appear, and they were deemed boring. That's the irony, really: when I started out, I would play around with DVD covers and that's what got me interested in graphics. When you go through the college system they want you to aim for what they deem "high end" stuff and you get pushed further and further away from the things that brought you to it.

What's a great deal of contemporary video art focuses on minimalist interpretations of iconic films, years ago positively bursting with detail and intricacy. What drew you towards that style?

It's all part of the old school, that particular style of representation. It's the kind of artwork that inspired me when I was younger. With the *Hobo* with a Shotgun poster, it was a concept poster, designed around the central idea of the film. I played about a little more on posters such as *The Inbetweeners*. That pushed my style a bit further. People do seem to like all the stuff that is very in-your-face, the guns and the boobs. I enjoyed stepping away from that with *The Inbetweeners*. I also did a poster for *Wake Before I Die*, which is a lot more minimal. A lot of the

work I get approached to do tends to fall closer towards exploitation and horror. There's such a strong collector's [market] around horror, which allows for the brilliant special editions that you see.

It seems like, for years, all we got was horrendously Photoshopped collages with incredibly ugly fonts.

You still get that. It's due to... designers now being art workers. It's also got a lot to do with marketing. When you speak to people like Graham [Humphreys], you hear about how, in the past, people would approach him with a very direct and clear idea of what they wanted. Now everything is controlled by project managers, or marketing departments, and they're often little despots. They all want total control. I've experienced the wits with some companies, when I've produced a piece of artwork and it's just got pushed through a process of endless meetings.

And it's been that way for years?

Years ago, I sent an email to Drew Struzan asking him about the poster art and design world at the time. He went on to tell me that he never actively retired and that he was pushed out of his business, all over matters of control and expediency, and it's clearly true. It all comes down to a person in an office with no artistic background. People don't want to spend too much if you hire someone to do artwork, it's naturally going to cost more in time and money. I'm lucky in that I'm working with some great companies now, who know what they want, but also have respect



A GHOST STORY FOR THE MINIMUM WAGE



for artistic license. It's a hairy industry and it can be weird sometimes. All I want to do is focus on creating great cover art for brilliant movies.

How long, on average, does it take to piece together a poster?

A poster is a bigger job than a video cover. A full poster can take me about a month. I do like to go through the film, get a feel for it and become familiar with certain key scenes. Between title design and concepts, I spend those over and usually progress from there. There's a lot of communication involved. Video covers would take about half that time.

When you were a kid, wandering around video stores, are you remember any particular covers that just kind of stuck into your mind?

That's a big factor in when I buy videos now, looking at the art I remembered as a kid. Stuff like *Grain Dealer*, *The Return of the Living Dead*, *Witch*, *Eye of the Tiger*. *Video Dead* is a fantastic one. There are two great covers on that, as it was reversible. The Burt of course, again that was Graham Humphreys.

How much direction do you like to be given when you're asked to create an image?

That film is always good, but I like to design more than illustrate. I watch the movies a few times and establish the best way to represent them. Finding the most effective way to communicate the message to the right people. I'm not just out to draw a picture, however. I'm also here to tell the movie, to get it out there and, above all, capture the mood. A lot of promotional artwork that gets released is not selling the film; they're just selling something that they think people will want to see. It's all about making money.

What's an example of that?

A perfect example would be a recent movie which took on images of a castle, cut it into blocks and made it look like a Rubik's Cube out of it. They just directly lifted the imagery from *The Cabin in the Woods* poster to try to pick up that audience. They did it with *The Innkeepers* in the UK as well. They made it look like *Hosel*. They put a massive *Elk* Hoth quote on it, with his name bigger than *Ti West's*. They also tried to make the cover look like torture porn. That's what sells. Distribution companies aren't interested in fans or genre people, they're just interested in the chance buyer, and that's getting worse. There's no physical place in the UK to buy any kind of media now, aside from the supermarkets. They're going to control the whole industry soon, and they just want our money. They don't care if we like it or enjoy it. Just pay us and get out. That's what Drew Shuren said to me: "Civilization is dying, and art's usually the first thing to go." The death of poster art all comes down to the loss of the National Screen Service (a company that centralized theatrical promotional material from the '40s to the '90s), because they used to control and commission, print and distribute all film poster art, particularly across America. The studios would approach them, but when everything went in-house, that's when things started to fall apart.

At least your art is helping to get fans excited about original artwork again. Which of your posters to date has pleased you the most?

I always say *The Innkeepers*, particularly because I've never been asked to do another job like it. I did two posters for [that film], but I hadn't seen a frame of the movie at the time. Just a few screen grabs. I didn't really know what I was doing. I went with Victorian ghost fest, that's something I really wanted to come through in the final piece.

There's also did that iconic *Father's Day* poster, which really helped sell the film. What kind of stuff are you working on and what would you like to see more of?

Check out Aaron-Eli's stuff, they're so good. Their shorts are really on the ball. *Lease* *Ghost 2* is amazing. I love all of Larry Fossender's stuff, and *Bliss* *Eye Pit* has turned out some really great movies, but they just don't get released in the UK. *Lease*. Something like *Adventures in 1/2* *See You*, Graham Reznick's new feature, which is an "adult horror movie 2009" in the words of his. No one's doing cheesy monster films though, we need more of those.

You can find out more about Tim Duke Designs at her website timdukedesigns.blogspot.co.uk, or on Twitter at @The_DukeDesigns.

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THE HOWLING
FINALLY TRANSFORMS
IN GLORIOUS HIGH
DEFINITION

LEADER OF THE PACK

by SCOTT NEUMYER

ACCORDING TO CHINESE ASTROLOGY, 1981 WAS THE YEAR OF THE ROOSTER.

Any horror fan can tell you that's supernatural bullshit, with *An American Werewolf in London*, *It*, and *The Howling* all hitting theaters that year. '81 belonged to the wolf.

Joe Dante's *The Howling* is just now getting the Blu-ray treatment, thanks to Screen Factory. Featuring the film's first ever high-definition transfer, the disc is packed with new bonus material such as deleted scenes and a director's commentary, as well as many of the previously released DVD bonus features, including the documentary *Unleashing the Beast: The Making of The Howling*.

Though in retrospect it seems the shapeshifter was the go-to ghoulie of the early '80s, Dante says that wasn't the case when his film went into production.

"Werewolf movies were not particularly popular at the time this movie came out," explains the filmmaker, whose resume also includes 1970's *Piranha* and 1984's *Gremlins*. "Daddy enough, it came out in a year where there were three or four other werewolf pictures, but they were, for the most part, independent of each other. Before that, the supernatural aspect [of horror-films] had been played away down and it was all about slashing and killing people on screen night... To try to modernize it and make it relevant, we decided to not advertise it as a werewolf film, and to suck the audience in a little bit by having them think it was going to be about a serial killer."

That serial killer is Eddie Quist (Robert Forster), and his twisted hobby is stalking television news reporter Karen White (Dor Watkinson). When a police operation leaves Quist supposedly dead and Karen severely traumatized, her therapist sends her to a remote resort known as The Colony, which turns out to be crawling with lycanthropes.

While *The Howling* is based on a 1957 novel by Gary Breznair, Dante's film boasts a decidedly more comedic tone than its source material, thanks in large part to a script rewrite by John Stykes (who also gave Dante's *Piranha* its satirical slant).

"I remember after the first day's delivery, the head of the company said, 'Is this a horror movie or is comedy?' Dante recalls. "I said, 'Well, it's kind of both.' I've always felt that, in this very cynical world, if you can't give people something to

laugh at it is a story that leaves their imagination, then they're going to find [humor] in the wrong place."

Much of the movie's staying power comes from the remarkable transformation its tormented heroine undergoes, both figuratively and literally. Wallace (Dye, 6'7" the Extra-Terrestrial), despite an earlier role in 1977's *The Hills Have Eyes*, never intended to angust himself as fully in the horror genre, but the chance to work on a film with such a dramatic emotional arc proved impossible to pass up.

"Back in the day that we made *The Howling*," the actress recalls, "horror films were not terribly color-coded other than by the amazing force that supported them. I don't go out looking to be a scream queen. That wasn't the plan... But I can tell you that I love drama and I love to create. I have to play as evil. I love to create the human dilemma, emotionally. Let's face it: the good horror film gives you all those opportunities."

Delighted FX artist Rob Bottin also got his fair share of creative opportunities on the set of the film. Bottin, who would go on to create creature FX for John Carpenter's *The Thing* the following year, was enlisted to engineer the *The Howling*'s famous transformation sequences. The budding FX whiz, who was only 22 years old when *The Howling* hit theaters, wasn't Dante's first choice, though. The director originally hired Rick Baker to bring his werewolf to life, in dog-skin, to may have accidentally helped create both of 1981's wolfy high-water marks.

"John [Lund] wouldn't have even made [*An American Werewolf in London*] if I hadn't hired Rick Baker to do *The Howling*," Dante claims. "Suddenly, he said to Rick, 'We promised you would do my werewolf movie.' So Rick said, 'Well, where is [Dye]?' And John said, 'Alright, I'm going to go and make it.' Unfortunately, it took Rick away from us because he had already promised John. But then just gave us Rob Bottin, and he really outdid himself on a very low budget."

Thirty-two years later, how does Dante think his and Bottin's well-oiled company to the classic transformation in that year's other legendary werewolf movie? He offers a typically wry answer.

"I don't know if it's better," he says. "I think it's better lol."

"I adore Joe," says Wallace of the unsmiling filmmaker, whose output has slowed down in recent years. "I think he's a brilliant director and a nice man. If they would just leave him alone and let him do what he does, he'd work more!"





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CINEMA

FILM + DVD + REISSUES



DOMO ARIGATO, MR. KOSTANSKI

MANBORG

Starring Adam Brooks, Matthew Kennedy
and Meredith Sweeney
Directed by Steven Kostanski
Written by Jeremy Gilmore and Steven Kostanski
Anchor Bay

Steve Kostanski must have long since worn out his welcome as a director of horror and exploitation in the manner of home and exploitation to drive inspiration from, he goes all the way to the bottom of the pit, the largely unexplored post-Tormentor cyborg movie cycle (think *Climax*, *Robot Joe*, etc.). And with his multi-angled brand of tribute, the filmmaker and the whole *Asylum* gang drop one of the funniest and most inspired genre flicks in ages—the incredible *Manborg*.

During his invasion of Earth, Hell's Count Dracula (Adam Brooks) commands his forces to lay waste to every living thing, including a brave pair of brothers on the frontlines of the battle. While one dies in a blood-spitting, aspirational-catchphrase-speaking hero, the other (Matthew Kennedy) is reduced to a bullet-riddled mess, but has enough

life left in him to be reborn. He awakens years in the future, as *Manborg*, part man, part uh, robot-man. Wandering the streets, *Manborg* is arrested and thrown into a cell, where he befriends a classic ragtag gang of misfits: a shortstop kung-fu fighter known as *El Man* (Ludwig Lee, with intentionally obvious voice-over by Kyle Hertz) and the punky sibling twins of *Mara* (Meredith Sweeney) and *Justice* (Conor Sweeney). Kept as pit fighters in battles against the

genetically malformed creations of Dr. Scorpion (Brooks again), the crew kick off evener of ass before a broken escape from the compound leads them to safety in the garbage-filled outskirts. But Dracula becomes *Mara* back, and soon they return to the city to deliver, and all of humanity, in an epic final battle with the forces of Hell. Let it be said that *Manborg* was made for somewhere in the ballpark at \$1500. Much of it was shot inside Kostanski's Winnipeg garage, with several props, costumes and sets crafted from found objects. But all of it is bent to fit the director's ambitious and impossibly specific vision, with the brilliant cost Jeremy Gilmore almost steals the show as the hopelessly love-struck henchman known as The Baron, ably traversing the line between sadistic and straight. For the true scope of Kostanski's merry to-

bits, check out the special features to see the un-filmed footage and compare it to the final product. The creativity on display is mind-blowing. And if the post-feature short *Elle-Cap* is any indication, we should be seeing more of it... in the future, of course. **TAL ZIMMERMAN**

A SANGUINE SET

TRUE BLOOD: THE COMPLETE FIFTH SEASON

Starring Stephen Moyer, Anna Paquin and Sam Trammell
Directed by David Mackenzie, Michael Lehmann,
David Petrarca, et al.
Written by Brian Koppelman, Mark Hudis, Rowle Tucker, et al.
HBO

True blood threw fewer storylines but a whole lot more of the red stuff at us in its fifth season, ultimately making for a much more coherent story arc (albeit one no less jarring for fans of the book series source material, which it only vaguely resembles at this point).

The Sanguinaries, a misad, faith-based movement of vampires who believe humans should be dead or not bothered, have infiltrated The Authority, the vampires' highest government, and BB (Stephen



Moyer) and Eric (Alexander Skarsgård) have been caught in the middle. Sookie (Anna Paquin) is reeling after killing werewolf Debbie Poff in her kitchen and discovers that that's just the first best-rocker she's going to have to come to terms with this season. Terry (Todd Lense) is being haunted by an Iraqi demon, which drives back to a curse that was placed upon him during his time serving in the Middle East. Tami (Julina Wessley) becomes a self-loathing vampire, and Jason (Ryan Kwanten) is still letting his dick get him into trouble, though even he gets more insight into his nature by season's end.

Once *Blood Season 5* delivers a stronger, more visceral outing than Season 4, few will dispute that, even if they (like me) disagree with the overall direction of the show. For those not thrilled with the narrative trajectory, the self-generous extras help reveal what was on the showrunners' minds and why they made the decisions they did. This won't necessarily win you over, but it is fascinating from a creative-creation standpoint. The best of the bonus features are the "Autopsy" mini-doc on Episode 6; Stephen Moyer's commentary on the episode he directed (wherein he discusses the types of choices that confront a director in every scene), and the "Enhanced Viewing" features, which provide additional back story via Pop-Up Video-like boxes and access to other exclusive content—including the in-character *Author's Confessions*—while watching the series.

Season 5 isn't likely to convert any new viewers, but this is another treat offering for those who already worship at the temple.

MONICA KUKLER

HACK JOB #873

NOBODY GETS OUT ALIVE

Starring: Ari Danbar, David J. Reiner and Chelcie Genser
Written and directed by Jason Christopher
Image

Revenge is a dish best served in excess—at least, that seems to be the mantra of every kickass serial killer who was ever the victim of a wrangloing.

Take the murderer from *Nobody Gets Out Alive*, for instance. After his daughter is hit and killed by a pre-lod of drunk teenagers, he takes it upon himself to retreat to a nearby forest with his trusty axe, where he proceeds to butcher any and all adolescents who happen to pass through in search of a good time. The film centres around a group of young adults who all fit into the "generic douche" category (with the exception of the token stoner, that is), but there really isn't anything else to them. Not surprisingly, they get murdered, and that's about it.

Little men can be said about the movie itself, other than that: The biggest mystery isn't what's going to happen on-screen, but rather, why these flicks are still being made? If you've ever seen a low-budget slasher movie, you've seen this one too, and a thousand others just like it. The acting is bad, the effects are cheesy and the attempts at building any sort of back story for these lame characters just feels forced. By the time the killer is revealed and he tells the tale of his tragic



Deadball: A killer pitch.

past, you've stopped caring—if you ever cared at all—and all you really want him to do is shut up and off everybody so the movie can finally end. It's physically painful to watch, and definitely not in the way the filmmakers intended.

There's a fine line between paying homage to classic slasher flicks and simply reaching a third base for the sake of making a movie, and unfortunately *Nobody Gets Out Alive* never stumbles anywhere near it. Clear as day, one way or the other, you may not make it out...well, you know.



NINE BEARBALL

BATTER SPLATTER

DEADBALL

Starring: Tiki Sakaeguchi, Mam Roshono and Rikio Hasegawa
Directed by Yuki Yamaguchi
Written by Kenta Isakai and Yuki Yamaguchi
Image

Baseball is huge in Japan—Godzilla huge! In fact, the Japanese have been playing it since 1872 and it's grown so popular that they now have two professional leagues battling twelve teams that battle it out in massive dome stadiums such as the Muzia Dome, Zosen Stadium in Hiroshima and the Fukuoka Yahoo! Japan Dome in Fukuoka City.

Now movie director Yuki Yamaguchi, the guy who helmed *Monster Machine* and was one of the co-writers of *Urotsu*, his first out his teeth back in 2003 directing an adaptation of a popular Gatozo Man manga called *Deadball*, in which a high school baseball team is pitted against a team of blue-faced zombies.

That's also pretty much the concept of *Deadball*, in which a team of condemned prisoners must compete in a death match against a bunch of bat dominatrices from a neo-Nazi high school, to the delight of the sadistic administrators who score each death on the basis of its cruelty and brutality and gore quotient. The prisoners' team is headed by pitcher Jubei Yikyu, played by Tiki Sakaeguchi (Pronounced KSC2-303 in *Verano*), a punk with a bad attitude, a deadly fastball and the ability to conjure

a lit cigarette out of thin air.

As documented as it sounds, *Deadball* actually works incredibly well because Yamaguchi somehow manages to deftly blend America's favorite pastime with martial arts, and, best of all, arseal spyny, because a red enough exaggerated carnage to please even the most jaded gorehound. Its only shortcoming is that it gets downright stupid at times, such as when a player is killed by a giant mousie, but there's a minor quibble against a film that still manages to knock it out of the billy part-shown park.

LAST CHANCE LANCE

BAD RABBITUDE

TORMENTED

Starring: Nakano Mitsuhisa, Takera Shobayashi and Teruyoshi Kagawa
Directed by Takashi Shimizu
Written: Takashi Shimizu, Sakura Hayashi and Shinya Hosokawa
Image

For awhile, the concepts of "evil life" and "innocent" aren't mutually exclusive. As children become adults, they learn to separate the two, but it can be a struggle. This battle is the pre that holds *Tormented*, a 3-D ghost tale about the terrifying breakdown of the walls between fantasy and reality, together.

Peculiar little loser Dango (Takera Shobayashi) is left so scared by his act of euthanizing a rabbit in distress that he becomes delusional. When his mate sister sister Kiriko (Nakano Mitsuhisa) takes him to a 3-D horror movie, he gets sucked into the screen by a boy rabbit that hovers in front of his face before taking him to the after side. There, the rabbit—a human form in a rabbit suit—chaperones Dango through an abandoned amusement park. But the bunny goes bad, morphing into an evil version of its earlier self, and aggressively tries to hold the boy in the world of fantasy. Dango is brought out of the nightmare by Kiriko, who finds him wandering in the desert. The bunny follows them back into the waking realm, as well as into the r coasts, terrorizing their until his back illustrates fear (Takera Kagawa) steps in and offers them as to what lies behind the events. Are they psychic episodes that stem from past traumas, or is the truly



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE VS. NINJAS

ENTER THE SKINBAG

NINJAS VS. ZOMBIES

Senses of Film

As a kid, all I wanted to be was a ninja...and I've got the scars to prove it. I bought a kung-fu costume after seeing an ad in the back of a magazine and promptly fell off my parents' roof trying to climb up a drainpipe, breaking my arm and cracking three ribs. And speaking of white guys pretending to be ninjas, *Ninjas Vs. Zombies* features those of them who team up with a wizard to stop their town from getting overrun by an army of gub-munchies. Also known as *Zombie Codebreakers*, this fun, low-budget ramp piece is a high

body count, lots of sick-ass fight scenes and a theme song that'll get stuck in your head like a well-placed throwing star.

BODY COUNT: 112

NINJAS-TO-ZOMBIES RATIO: 2:110

IMMORTAL COMBAT

NINJAS VS. VAMPIRES

Wilder Circle Films

The njas are back! And this time they're fighting off an army of vampires instead of leading off the same town that just survived a zombie epidemic. *Ninjas Vs. Vampires* is the sequel to *Ninjas Vs. Zombies* and features the same njas that made it through the first film, as well as a newbie who wants to rescue his girlfriend from the clutches of the evil bloodsucker leader and his gang of underlings. Director Justin Timpane has upped his game quite a bit since his last outing, giving this film a much more polished look and feel. The fight scenes are cooler than ever, but best of all, he brings

back a copious script with lots of action and no gratuitous nudity. Worst of all: no gratuitous nudity!

BODY COUNT: 45

NINJAS-TO-VAMPIRES RATIO: 4:71

STAR DREK

ALIEN VS. NINJA

Bushy Typeless

Finally, real Japanese njas! The kind that sweat, move silently and are, you know, actually Japanese! Set in feudal Japan, *Alien Vs. Ninja* follows a group of njas sent to explore reports of glowing lights in the forest. Turns out an alien ship has crashed there and is spewing out alien ETs to wreak havoc on nearby villages. Reminiscent of *Hydrix*, Kitamura's masterpiece *Ninjas*, this fast-paced, action-packed garb that's drenched with frenetic violence, lights and copious amounts of blood and dismembered limbs. But

whereas the njas look absolutely amazing, the aliens are more akin to that green lizard creature that Kirk fought on the original *Star Trek* TV series. And there aren't enough CG enhancements or kung-fu moves in the world to make 'em look threatening. Sulu, bear down some hotter bad guys!

BODY COUNT: 33

NINJAS-TO-ALIENS RATIO: 62:19

haunted by a malevolent spirit? Could the two possibilities somehow be linked?

Recalling elements of *Danse Macabre* (2001) and *Shenzi's* own *Ju-On* (2003), *Tormented* just barely stands on its own creative feet, never truly rising past the standard J-horror model. It isn't so much the nature of the plot twists that feels contrived, as much as the fact that you know they're coming to fill in blanks that hang open until their obligatory resolutions. On a technical level, however, Christopher Doyle's 3-D photography is, at times, breathtaking, and heavyweight composer Kerry Krew's score adds much-needed scope. The movie within-a-movie is a lot of fun, too (think medical monomelic amnesia). So even if *Tormented* doesn't follow you in and out of your dreams, it's far from torturous.

TAL ZIMMERMAN

YOU SLEEP, THEY CREEP

SHADOW PEOPLE

Starring Dallas Roberts, Alison Eastwood and Renee Radek
Written and directed by Matthew Amodei
Anchor Bay

Have you ever struggled to wake up from a nightmare where you felt as though someone was pressing down on your chest and literally squeezing the life out of you? It's commonly known as sleep paralysis, but it's been linked to a much more serious affliction called *SUNDS* (Sudden Unexplained Nocturnal Death Syndrome). And though you can wake up from a bout of sleep paralysis out of breath and in a cold sweat, if you develop *SUNDS*, you obviously won't wake up at all.

Shadow People opens in 1979 in a remote Cambodian village where a child, frightened by the amorphous shapes he sees lurking in the dark corners of his bedroom, is found dead by his mother shortly after he's put to bed. The rest of the movie is set in present-day Kentucky, where a burnt-out late-night DJ, played by Dallas Roberts (*The Day After Tomorrow*), investigates the increasing number of otherwise healthy young men and women who are inexplicably dying in their sleep. As he searches for answers, he progressively becomes more and more paranoid, to the point where he's blaming the deaths on a group of supernatural entities that he calls the "shadow people."

Highly reminiscent of the adrenaline-fueled thriller *The Fourth Kind*, the movie desperately tries to persuade us that it's a factual account by providing a large number of piddling, videotaped witness interviews and grainy, found-footage medical recordings, which serve no purpose other than to muddle the storyline and heighten some of the fear or dread that it's trying to build.

This is the kind of movie that'll either leave you sleeping with all the lights on for a couple of weeks or, if you're anything like me, you'll be fast asleep before the end credits roll. Either way, sweet dreams!

LAST CHANCE LANCE

LAST CHANCE LANCE

FORTY-TWO YEARS AFTER *THE CORPSE GRINDERS*,
TED V. MIKELS CRANKS UP THE MEAT MACHINE
ONE MORE TIME

GRISTLE FOR THE MILL

BY
DAN NEUFELD

**THE BUENO NEWS: A SLEEPY SPANISH VILLA IS ROLLING
OUT THE WELCOME MAT FOR A NEW, JOB-CREATING PET
FOOD MANUFACTURER THAT HAS MOVED TO TOWN.**

The main news: That manufacturer happens to be the infamous Lotus Cat Food Company (not to be confused with the *For Cats Who Love People*), and it won't be long for eatables, flesh-eating felines to start favoring the locale. *(A) carnal!*

Eighty-four-year-old exploitation filmmaker extraordinaire Ted V. Mikels recently premiered the latest chapter of his *Corpse Grinder* saga at the Vegas International Film Festival, more than four decades after the first installment. Directed by Manelito Motoserra and written by Motoserra and Marc Gira, *The Corpse Grinders 3* was filmed in Spain over a three-week period. Mikels served as executive producer and was given final approval over the shots and edits.

"Marc Gira, a producer in Barcelona, provided me with some footage of the city's highlights, which we used in *Acid-Jambies AM: Invaders From Cyberspace*," Mikels says. "The extra credits' laser-eyes obliterated the city's landmarks. It was so much fun for Marc working with me as director/producer. Richard Lester as associate producer and Barry Lester as first assistant director, that he suggested we get together and make a remake of *The Corpse Grinders*. It developed into a three-way international co-production."

Mikels first introduced filmpoints to the Lotus Cat Food Company in 1971's *The Corpse Grinders*. With the cost of quality ingredients putting a financial strain on the company, the staff decides to ditch farm-fresh livestock in favour of humans, ground down to a fine chuck. Naturally, the cats that eat the food develop a taste for human flesh, and tabbies start unleashing their inner fangs.

The lively grinding machine was dusted off again in 2000 with the release of *The Corpse Grinders 2*. The second chapter featured mass catnip parties and more onramp passies, but this time cat-killers and dog-killers were added to the mix.

The third installment of the campy horror-comedy trilogy doesn't stray too

far from the formula of its predecessors (other than moving the setting to Spain). This time, the felines that feast on the man-burger mutate into Chupacabra-esque monsters. Once again, blood is spilled, kitties go berserk, and the hapless are fed feet-first into the grinder.

The Lotus business model might not have changed much over the years, but social media has made it much easier for the filmmaker to generate awareness and build audiences than it was back in the 1970s, Mikels explains.

"In releasing the first *Corpse Grinders* movie, I had to determine where I could best utilize the first five or ten 35 mm prints, working to get booked into theatres and drive-ins where high opening grosses led other bookings to book my movie in their houses. When most opening grosses were high, it usually meant you were on your way to having a winner on your hands, because then other theatres wanted to book your movie for play-dates. Then I would use good box-office returns to buy more 35 mm prints to play more theatres si-

multaneously, until I had enough prints to cover bookings across the country. Now, bookings are not available, but Facebook, Twitter and other venues spread the word about your movie in days, if not hours, reaching more people than you could ever hope to reach 40 years ago."

Always a consummate showman and promoter, Mikels has provided some unique swag to the first 100 customers who order *Corpse Grinders 3* on DVD. In addition to the movie, they receive an original 1971 printed certificate of assurance (which had to be signed by viewers to see the first *Corpse Grinder* movie), a Ziploc plastic bag labelled "Ground Up Human Cadaver Flesh from the Corpse Grinding Machine," a Lotus Cat Food label designed to slip over canned goods in the pantry and an autographed colour photo. Ultimately, though, it's not the swag that matters.

"It seems like the popularity of horror films, especially comedy horror films, never wanes," Mikels notes. "Subject matters are so diverse that there is an excellent opportunity to explore all of the areas of fascination for a viewer."

The Corpse Grinders 3 is available for \$19.95 (plus \$5.95 priority mail shipping and handling in the US) and can be ordered by cheque or money order to Ted V. Mikels, 148 Greenbriar Townhouse Way, Las Vegas, NV 89121 or by PayPal at twistedgoodies.com. @



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D CAN HEMLOCK GROVE BE THE FIRST TV SERIES TO WATCH LONDON'S TAKE ON BRITAIN'S MOST-WANTED MONSTER? NOT YET. BECAUSE YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED, THIS AGAIN.

"There's a major deviation at the end that we kept them in the dark about," McGreevy says, during a series of roundtable promotional interviews earlier this year in Toronto. "That's also to keep them on their toes. You think you know what we're doing, bruhes? Take that!"

Add McGreevy's writing partner Lee Shipman. "We're not above putting a hatchet in anyone's head."

Released last year, McGreevy's novel detailed the odd happenings in a Pennsylvania town in the wake of a local high school girl's murder. Teaming up to find the killer are gypsy teen Peter Romanoski (played in the show by Landon Libiron) and rich local boy Roman Gothroy (Bill Skarsgård; younger brother to *True Blood*'s Alexander Skarsgård), in addition to being from different sides of the tracks, Peter is a werewolf, while Roman can control minds. Also in the mix are Roman's domineering mother Olivia (Janis Jansen), his hulking, mutant sister and the family's shady corporation, which conducts various medical experiments.

McGreevy, who grew up in a poor part of

Pennsylvania, says the genesis of *Hemlock Grove*, which he started writing in grad school, came from a basic premise.

"I wanted to take the major archetypal monsters of the modern era—which are Dracula, Frankenstein and The Wolfman—and put them in my high school. So, for me, resolving my feelings about adolescence was the same thing."

McGreevy was making a living writing scripts with Shipman that studios "had no intention of

making" when they were approached by producers looking to turn *Hemlock Grove* into the next *Twilight* or *Hunger Games*. ("We promptly middle-fingered them," Shipman says.) Then they met with producer Eric Newman (*Dawn of the Dead* remake, *The Last Exorcism Part II*) and *Hostel* director Eli Roth, who steered them towards online cable provider Netflix. A thirteen-episode last season was greenlit and shot in and around Toronto over six

months last year, with Roth directing the first episode.

While it has elements of horror, executive producer and series director Deran Sarafian (*House*, *CSI: NY*) denies that *Hemlock Grove* is actually a genre show, despite Libiron's much-talked-about transformation, which combines CGI, practical effects and real wolves in a bloody

sequence in which Peter bursts out of his own skin as a wolf.

Sarafian, who worked with Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci and John Carpenter early in his career, says, "I wanted it to feel like *An American Werewolf in London*. I wanted it to feel like *The Thing*... Unfortunately, you've got to sell your story, and that was a good thing to sell it on. We're dealing with the dualities of human beings. I mean, 'the monster within' is such a brilliant campaign, because it really is about the dualities of these people and who they are."

Hemlock Grove will get another season if Netflix decides it's popular enough, however McGreevy says there will be no more books because the first novel wrapped up everything he had to say about the town and its creepy inhabitants.

"I was invited to speak at Fowl Con, which is the first annual lycanthropy-based fan convention," he says, laughing. "So as far as fan concern I'm already a fucking success." ■



HEMLOCK GROVE

ALL EPISODES APRIL 19

NETFLIX



Landon Libiron as werewolf Peter Romanoski

REISSUES

TEARS FOR SHEARS

THE BURNING (1981) Blu-ray/DVD

Starring Gene Matthews, Leah Ayres and Brian Becker
 Directed by Tony Maylam
 Written by Peter Lawrence and Bob Wakenstein
 Screenplay Factory

The Burning languished in relative obscurity for most of its life, but it seems to have become a part of most slasher fans' consciousness after finally getting a North American DVD release in 2007.

Based around an old New York urban legend, the movie begins with a summer camp prank that goes awry, leading to the hideous disfigurement of local caretaker Cropsey, who returns years later with a pair of hedge clippers to seek revenge on a new group of kids.

British director Tony Maylam sets up some stylish kills but the movie is bogged down by its slow pace, with long periods of nothing happening. When cutters get out it's a good time, but ultimately *The Burning* is more of a curiosity than a gem, a minor slasher that happened to launch the Wakenstein brothers' Miramax company and feature early performances by Jason Alexander (*Seinfeld*) and Holly Hunter. It's also remembered for being the movie that Tom Savini agreed to take on instead of *Friday the 13th Part 2*.



Fortunately, Screen Factory did not skimp on the good stuff, and added some new extras to the Blu-ray in addition to perling others over. You still get the audio commentary with Maylam and journalist Alan Jones but there is now an additional one with actors Shelley Bruce and Bonnie Donike, though it's a bit of a strange move given that neither of them really play big roles. *Blood 'n' Fire* Memories, a look at Savini's makeup effects, appears again; this is good because it's really the best feature on the disc, providing an inside look at the film's main attraction: blood and latex. There are also new interviews with editor Jack Sholder (who would go on to direct *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2*), Lou David (Cropsey) and star Leah Ayres, all of which are gold.

Like a lot of Blu-ray versions of low-budget horror movies, this one ends up exposing some of the special effects, though the surprisingly pristine transfer does enhance the natural beauty of the wilderness, as well as the colours in Savini's bloodierling. More importantly, Rick Wakenstein's haunting score comes through sharp and scary.

All in all, a complete package, unless you honestly expect Jason Alexander to come back and do a commentary here. Consider this a nice "in" to

look at an imperfect film from an era in honor that simply no longer exists.

AARON VAN LIPSTON

I WANT TO SARE YOUR...

SEXUAL (1974) DVD

Starring Debbie Collins, Jaime Grande

and Julia Alexander

Directed by John Holbrook

Written by David E. Ruy

Impulse Pictures

Sexula is a hilarious and confusing example of Canadian exploitation gold, but not the 14-least kind. Directed by John Holbrook (under the pseudonym Bob Hollowick), it's partly a spoof of the Universal monster movies and partly a legitimate attempt at a pornographic feature amidst the porno-chic boom of the 1970s. And there's good reason the Vancouver-shot flick saw an audience only once before disappearing — until it was dug up in a government archive by Rue Morgue's own Paul Corpe and picked up for distribution by Impulse.

A woman (Debbie Collins) and her boyfriend narrate the farcical plot from an old journal found within a spooky mansion that she inherits from her ancestors (She does so naked, of course.) She soon introduces us to Dr. Foliofornstein (Jaime Grande) and her creation Frank (John Alexander), whom she whipped up in the lab to satisfy her sexual urges. But Frank's defective sexual apparatus leads the good doctor to call upon her niece, the Countess Sexula (Collins, again), who's an expert on all things canon, to get her creator's juices flowing. After several failed attempts at reviving his libido, including a stripper versus gonks domestic performance you have to see to believe, Sexula determines that Frank is missing "sex cells" and goes on a mission to get him some. She enlists the unwilling help of a brawny lumberjack, a drunkard on a date with a hooker and the entire on-set cast and crew of a wedding-themed party, to harvest Frank's missing nookie neurons.



Is she successful in sparking Frank's interest in the opposite sex, or really any sex at all? We may never know, as they apparently forgot to film the ending.

Peppered throughout the thin plot are a mix of soft- and hardcore sex scenes, with all the hard ones seemingly salvaged in from other projects. Most obvious is the lengthy fandango wedding ceremony sequence that has nothing to do with anything else in the film, and doesn't even appear to be set within the same time period.

The sex is only marginally arousing and the acting and dialogue are laughable, but some effort was put into set construction and dramatic lighting. And of course, no serious horror slasher flick is com-

plete without a rindy hunchback named Orgie, a table-bound female pleasure-bot and a gorilla with the key to its own cage. And when the three are united in slow motion, it's pure, so-bad-it's-good magic. Countless, more gorilla please!

KAT VON PIRE

BONED TO DEATH

THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN (1976) [R, Blu-ray]

Starring Andrew Prince, Ben Johnson and Duane Wells

Directed by Charles B. Pierce

Written by Carl E. Smith

Scream Factory

Love it or hate it, true crime occupies an important role in the horror genre. From Countess Bathory to Dahmer, the inspirations behind celluloid's cold-blooded

killers add an extra dimension of uneasiness to their projected adaptations: you know it really happened, and even worse, could happen again. Thanks to Scream Factory, the Phantom Killer of Texasians—the real-life

Charles B. Pierce's long-out-of-print 1976 shocker *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*—returns to terrorize audiences in all his Southern-fried glory.

Based on a series of brutal attacks that took place 67 years ago in a sleepy border town that straddles Texas and Arkansas, *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* is a charming, if obviously low-budget, cop's-eye-view of a hunt for a killer who left residents petrified to leave their homes at night. Though only active between February and May of 1946, and with a relatively small body count (four murders in total), the hooded menace sent waves of fear through the community, even prompting some folks to board up their windows. His modus operandi is so odd (joining his victims during one attack, using a blade-littered tombstone in another) that local deputy Norm Ramsey (Andrew Prince) enlists the aid of high-profile lawman J.D. Morales (Ben Johnson) to find some pattern in the assaults. After one attack, where a victim (Duane Wells, of *Dillan's Island* fame) is shot twice through the face and liver, the police manage to locate the killer and one final chase ensues. In the film's present-day prologue, an audience is seen lining up for a screening of *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*. Among them is a familiar, ominous pair of boots—a shot that drives home the point that the killer was never captured.

With its POV style and genuinely penny creep of a masked killer, this is a wonderfully rough precursor to the slasher era. Plus, Ben Johnson is fan-



One-wild Duane Wells in *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*

tastic as a man-reunited of a Southern gentleman who gets things done. Pierce himself even has a small role as Officer Spengler, an effective comic-relief character who has to cross-dress in one scene to try to bait the killer.

Scream Factory's new DVD/Blu-ray combo looks and sounds great. New interviews with Prince, Wells and cinematographer James Robertson reveal fond recollections of working with director Charles B. Pierce, and Pierce's thriller *The Endless* (1978) is presented in its entirety as a DVD-only extra. Another great release from Scream Factory.

TAL ZWIERSMAN



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—Publishers Weekly, Starred Review

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THE LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

FILE: *Puppet Master*

By Paul Corio

When Castle didn't have much to prove to moviemakers by the 1970s. After spending almost his entire working life turning audiences into theatres with dazzling gimmicks and the canny showmanship of films such as *The Tigger*, *House on Haunted Hill*, and *Homicide*, he eventually mounted the most ambitious film of his career. An eccentric, largely penniless effort, the bizarre *Shanks* (1974) has celebrated movie artist Marcel Marceau in a dual role as an old inventor who has figured out how to reanimate the dead and as a mute puppeteer who uses this technique to make corpses dance to his commands. There were no buyers under stars or cardboard "Shut Flowers" this time, just a culty-fest that stands as Castle's most unorthodox contribution to cinema.

Though it's now canonized for horror geeks past their prime to hedge their bets on less ambitious work, attracting audiences almost entirely on the strength of their decades-old reputations, Castle put his name on the line with *Shanks*, and lost. More than 30 years after directing his last significant horror film, *Shogun*, he gave audiences one of London's most fascinating talents, a grotesquely beautiful love letter to cinema that also nicely sums up his own career.

In the film, deaf-mute puppeteer Malcolm Shanks (Marceau) is living in poverty, enduring the cruel bullying of his sister and her drunken husband (Phillips Day and Talla Ghelton). Shanks works for Mr. Walker (Marceau, again), an inventor who has discovered a way to make corpses seem alive—using a small control box, he gives them electric jolts to make their limbs twitch. When Walker dies unexpectedly, Shanks brings the body back to some semblance of life. He then uses Walker's invention to kill off and reanimate his obnoxious relatives, even putting on a birthday "puppet" show for his only friend, local teen Colla (Grady Elbacher). But when a rough



Marcel Marceau (left) with Alvaro as "Genghis Khan."

skin gang unexpectedly crashes the party and rapes Colla, Shanks must again use the dead to get justice.

Presented as "A Grim Fairy Tale," *Shanks* is a major departure from Castle's other work, highlighting the incredible pantomime skills of Marceau (along with fellow mime performers Clay and Chelton), which infuse the film with a lyrical quality missing from the director's previous outings. Two years before Mel Brooks would help reignite interest in the silent film era with his parody *Shogun*, *Shanks* is a notable throwback to the films Castle grew up on, incorporating minimal dialogue, black and white identities and old-fashioned shockbook humour (it was not the first time Castle paid tribute either: *The Tigger* takes place in a silent film theatre).

And these silent film-like moments also provide the movie's most memorable imagery. Shanks twirling control box dials to control Walker's face muscles into a creepy smile, evading cops by propping up his dead sister on the couch in front of the TV, and the party itself, during which an animated corpse accidentally slices off several fingers while serving Shanks a piece of cake.

That Castle continued Paramount to make *Shanks* is admirable, yet it's hard to see it as anything but a miracle. Perhaps due in part to reported creative conflicts between Marceau and Castle on set, *Shanks* never quite pulls together into a cohesive horror film. For one, the mixing sequences are long and paced slower than the rest of the narrative, and they're not helped by composer Alex North's score. Castle has gone beyond horror in the 1980s to make films with gentle comedy and family-friendly sentimentality, but he can't quite get the right mix here, oscillating between pitch-black humor, serene beauty and genuinely creepy sequences before taking a hard left turn into a rape-revenge tale. But what really hurts the film is that it lacks the sense of childlike wonder of other horror "fairy tales" of the time such as *Lemonade* or *Child's Tale* of the Supernatural and *Wolfe* and *Her Week of Wonders*.

Never before released on home video, *Shanks* makes its debut on Blu-ray from Olive Films as a welcome addition for Castle fanatics and fans of Hollywood train wrecks alike. A strange code to the creator of one of the genre's most precious personalities, it's also proof that even an over-the-top failure can be more interesting than an aging director who heartlessly recycles past themes and ideas. In the end, that may be *Shanks*'s best gimmick. **C**

RECENTS GADGETS





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DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

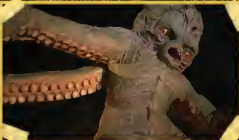
Epic Flail by John W. Bowen

Guy-in-subter-monster-aud? I mean—hey, I love 'em. You love 'em. Some of you even love 'em enough to write whiny-ass hate mail when I got a factoid or two wrong about their sizeability on DVD. And as often as not, the worse the critter design, the more entertaining the film. Because let's face it, not every movie monster is gonna be an *epic*—let alone in the same pending lot—with that Black Lagoon guy or R.R. Eiger's Alien design. Would *The Great Silence*, *Zard*, *Prophecy* or *The Navigator* of *Party Beach* have been nearly as much fun if the monsters had actually been scary? In a word, *ptui*.

To that end, I'm often asked what my pick would be for the most horribly bad monster design I've encountered so far. I hope I never have to make that difficult choice—these things are more fun in numbers—but today at least, there's a new top contender in town, and its name is *Octanero* (1977).

A human/octopus hybrid? Why, yes. And yes, he walks upright. And yes, he's righteously pleased that his (i.e., tough) natural habitat is being invaded by pussy humans—scientists, beauty hunters and sinners, hapless Mexicans alike—and the bastards are gonna pay. And yes, he has big squishy baby eyes that occasionally glow and a mouth that looks like well, there's no kind way to put it: a bathrobe. A big, gooey, inflated bathrobe with snaggly teeth.

But on to more pressing matters, like tentacles. *Octanero*'s got the standard-issue nautical, consisting of one covering each of actor Red Morgan's arms and legs, plus another attached to the back of each leg and two more sets below his arms. These lower upper arms (are you following me here?) are idly



warily wired to the others for muscle or flailing ability (and there's a lot of flailing going on) or allowed to flop limply at his sides, depending upon whether a given situation demands it flail or a flop. And when said demands include wading the interlopers, it's usually by way of a huge, wildding, tentacular blitz that lays 'em out in a single blow, or a kind of octo-conductor deal that's dependent upon the victim holding the tentacles in place. Then again, he just kind of spears the one dude through the chest as well.

The what? Pfft! I guess I could piece that together for you, as long as you promise not to ask why any of it happens, because that'll just complicate matters. For instance, why are wees tiny mutant octopi being found in fresh water by American scientists in

Mexico? Well, there's a nuclear angle, but beyond that, don't ask. Why do various characters keep referring to *Octanero* as a *negrito*? Don't ask. Why does Oscar-bedecked effects legend Jack Baker leave this early effort off his resume? Don't ask me, but feel

free to ask him, and let me know how that turns out.

Surprisingly, some cast members actually do take a moment for trifle purposes (or trifle reasons), specifically TV and B-list veterans Kenan Matthews (*The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*) and Jeff Morrow (*This Island Earth*, *The Creature Walks Among Us*), yes, that *Bowen's Basement* fave *The Giant Claw*, but it's gotta Sordides stunner *Pier Angel* who truly warrants a minor flurry of tentacles here in the 1950s and early '60s. *Angel* hovered on the verge of stardom after appearing opposite Paul Newman in *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1958) and continued to work steadily in movies and TV in both the '50s and '60s without ever achieving the big breakthrough everyone had predicted. Early on, she was romantically linked to Kirk Douglas and eventually married Vic Damone, although in some interviews she claimed that the only man she ever truly loved was James Dean, with whom she was briefly involved around the time he was appearing in the classic-in-waiting *Giant* with Rock Hudson and Elizabeth Taylor ("I loved Jimmy as I have loved no one else in my life, but I could not give him the enormous amount that he needed," she once told an interviewer. *Rock*: "Yeah, he really was just as fucking neurotic as you've always suspected.") *Angel*, reportedly terrified of turning 40, died of a heart attack overseas at 39 just as production on *Octanero* was winding down. Helluva flick to go out on.

Now get the hell out of my basement, and don't ask why. Because, trust me, you can't want to know.



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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Since its debut in 2011 as a four-issue miniseries, *Witch Doctor*, by writer Brandon Seifert and artist Lukas Kniehr, has become one of the most beautifully bizarre comics on the market: a gruesome tale of the occult by way of science, magic, gross biology, monsters and medical soap opera. The initial story was followed up by a fantastic one-shot—an instant sell-out—and the six-part *Witch Doctor: Mal Practice*, both of which have been conveniently collected in a new trade paperback.

Seifert always had an urge to pen comics but it wasn't until his first freelance artist Kniehr in 2007 that the dream became reality. The pair created *Witch Doctor*, a self-published "demo" comic that caught the attention of *Walking Dead* creator Robert Kirkman, who quickly commissioned a miniseries under his imprint Skybound Entertainment.

Kirkman was right to be intrigued by the musings of Dr. Vincent Morrow, one of the foremost specialists in supernatural diseases. The first series introduced us to the good doctor and his companions: paramedic and novice to the paranormal Eric East, and Penny Dreadful, a former patient turned helper, who also plays host to a demon with an appetite for pen-dimensions.

Together they encounter vampires, demon-possessed babies, faerie changelings and the Lovecraftian Deep Ones.

"*Witch Doctor Volume Two: Mal Practice* was really about slowly laying groundwork for future stories," explains Seifert. "Lukas and I both knew we were doing something pretty weird, and if we didn't 'tease' readers into it we risked losing them. So the first series was all about introducing our cast and the world they're in, and showing the readers the sorts of things we were going to do with the book, the sorts of stories we were going to tell and threats we were going to have. After we'd done that, and after we knew our fans were definitely along for the ride, we got to open up and do stuff we didn't feel comfortable with in the first series."

The result is *Mal Practice*, a story which exposes Dr. Morrow to a deadly supernatural parasite. Realizing the infection was deliberate, Morrow must not only race to find a cure but also discover the identity of his attacker and deal with him and his monster posse.

While the first series showcased monsters readers would recognize (the aforementioned vampires, faeries, multi-lentacled behemoths, etc.), *Mal Practice* explores less familiar territory, pulling in more obscure creatures from Southeast Asian and Caribbean folklore. Yet, ultimately, it's the series' tying in of the supernatural with modern medicine that gives it a truly unique edge.

"Ever since we started the project I've been tearing my brain to look at the supernatural through a biological lens, and to look at biology from a supernatural angle. Eventually it got to the point where I couldn't turn it off. At this point, I look at something like demonic possession and go, 'Oh, obviously demons go through "indirect development" like bugs and amphibians, and "possession" is just the parasitic larval stage in the demon lifestyle.' That's how weird this project has made my brain."

Luckily, Seifert has found the perfect artist in Kniehr, to bring his demarcated visions to life.

"Lukas is great at giving a story a classic horror vibe, and adds a lot of texture and tone with the way he draws people and locations. He's also really good at drawing weird contemplations, so I try to give him plenty of those to go crazy on. But most of all, for my money Lukas is the most talented monster designer in comics. The monsters he comes up with always blow my mind. Lukas always adds amazing little touches I never would've come up with, like turning the tail



Witch Doctor Volume 2: A grotesque tale of supernatural parasites

of a demon larva that looks like a monkey into an umbilical cord that keeps it attached to its host!"

Kniehr's affinity for the world of *Witch Doctor* is one of the reasons it's unlikely the book will ever become a regular monthly title, despite Seifert having plenty of new ideas.

"The catch is, it takes Lukas a long time to draw each issue. So *Witch Doctor* can never be a monthly comic, not without bringing in other artists, which would be complicated. Also, because of the book's success, I've gotten more offers of work than I can really handle."

Witch Doctor Volume 2: Mal Practice goes on sale June 2013.

FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABEZUELO



The origin of vampire *Barnabas Collins* was dealt with in depth in the original *Dark Shadows* television series, but this is the first time the story has been addressed in a comic book. Luckily, *Dark Shadows: Year One* is not a straight-out adaptation, and long-time fans will still find much to enjoy. The major beats are here in the 19th century wealthy *Barnabas Collins* is about to marry the love of his life, *Jessette*. Unfortunately, *Angelique* the witch wants *Barnabas* for herself and plots to turn him into the vampire — a scheme that will ultimately transform *Barnabas* into a vampire and lead *Jessette* to kill herself (that's not a spoiler, by the way). *Nerys Andrejko's* script moves at a good pace and nicely captures the characters' individual voices, while *Guru Vlasov* provides his usual top-notch art. A nice treat for fans and a great way for newbies to see what all the gothic fuss is about.



Almost a year Into its run, *Moar Aliens* continues to be one of the most fun and creative books on the market. This issue is a perfect jumping-on point for new readers, serving as a refresher on the



team's mission and M.O. using the premise of a myth-busting reality show to cover up its genuine paranormal investigations. However, rather than being a filler, especially issue, the brains behind the book have spaced things up by de-

vising two halves to the same story, one deals with the team exploring a very real haunted house, the other shows how their footage was used on the *Hunters* show to discredit the supernatural activity they encountered. It's a clever way of reminding readers at the book's original readers, and though it may be a disposable tale in the scheme of the larger arc, it's done with such confidence and originality you won't mind the slight detour.

Originally published in the pages of *Dark Nexus*, *Presets*, *Alena's* *Alena's* *Goodman* centres on *Joan Dyluck*, a "Socialization Specialist" as a distant, frozen world who is employed by the *Melvard-Rutani* corporation to train artificial

persons (*Joan Bishop* from *Aliens*) how to better interact with humans. Unfortunately, *Dyluck* was recently the only survivor of a xenomorph attack that killed the man she claims was her fiancé. Barely holding onto her sanity, her life unravels even further when she learns the corporation plans on treating the artificial life forms — which she's grown rather attached to — as alien fodder. At a mere 51 pages, the book clicks along at a fast pace, but *John Layman* does a good job of fleshing out *Dyluck's* character and presenting a dark, nihilistic story that fits perfectly within the *Alien* mythos, especially with its haunting ending. The true standout, however, is *Sam Keith's* art, which gives an almost certainly look to the aliens that somehow doesn't rob them of their menace. A worthy addition to the canon.



Abe woke up from his long coma and went *AWOL*. Puzzled by his disappearance, the *SPRD* search for him while he secretly travels the country, learning the devastation caused by the recent *Red on Earth* storyline events and hoping to find some answers regarding his origin. Meanwhile, a would-be Satanist and child-killer lurks in the background. Although *Abe* keeps mostly in the shadows in *Abe Sapien #1*, it's great to have everyone's favourite fish man up and about and in his own series no less. The purpose of his

quest is still shrouded in mystery, a nice hook for old and new readers alike, and Mike Mignola and Scott Allie are wise to tie it into the larger *SPRD* story, ensuring this *Mignolaverse* continues its renowned cohesion. Artist *Sebastian Fumero* brings a nice restrained touch to the proceedings, keeping to the overall sombre theme.

In a small, desolate American town, a recovering alcoholic is tormented by his inner demons. Meanwhile, an overzealous pastor witnesses a

wooden, eight-foot Jesus hanging on his church wall come to life. *Tom McKeown's* art is perfectly suited to the bizarre and disturbing, and he wastes little time displaying that talent in the opening pages, which see the drinker's dreams come to life as a decomposed cat and some kind of hooded wraith with large teeth. As strange as that might sound, it's even more disturbing on the page, helped immensely by the decision to print in black and white and a slightly larger format than the average comic. *Shadows: Jesus* boasts a strong opening to what promises to be a cemented and twisted odyssey.



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THE NINTH CIRCLE BOOKS

HOW TO MAKE MOVIES

Kevin J. Lindemann
McFarland

Not a step-by-step guide, as the title may suggest, *How to Make Movies* is, rather, an organized collection of interviews on low- and no-budget filmmaking. To the right fan of that world, it's a bounty of knowledge, but to everyone else, it might be a useless investment.

Comprehensive, to say the least, the book advises the wannabe indie auteur on virtually every aspect of low-budget filmmaking (from inspiration to making a career out of indie film production) via the opinions and experiences of 24 independent filmmakers (most with horror-titled CVs). Author Kevin J. Lindemann, who has more than a few genre flicks under his own belt (including *Vampires and Other Strangebeasts* and *Rage of the Wasteland*), introduces every topic (Film School, Budget and Funding, Special Effects, etc.) explaining its importance to indie filmmaking. Following that, a question is posed: How do you source locations? How do you handle special effects? How do you tackle the publicity of your film? They're answered, in varying degrees of depth, by the ensemble of do-it-yourself directors.

There's a lot of good stuff in here for the aspiring filmmaker: Maurice Dewateraux (*End of the Line*) talks about how he sold off the rights to his early films and ended up with no money; Keith Coker (*The Bloody Ape*) describes why you should have a designated special-effects person and not do it yourself; and John Borowski (*H.H. Holmes America's First Serial Killer*) explains why grassroots marketing and internet resources are the best way to go. Occasionally these uncredited filmmaker interviews suffer from overused points, minor handlings and negative advice, but that doesn't change the fact that *How to Make Movies* is a good reference guide for the budding cannibal Coppola.

Featuring additional words from Jim Mickle (*Stake Land*), Raffi Karetzky (*There's Nothing Out There*) and Jose Prados (*Monster Allie*), Lindemann's book will also appeal to the indie horror fan, as it reads like a compilation of commentary tracks from some of the genre's favorite thrills.

making it a great addition to your cut-rate collection—assuming, of course, you're into the kind of thing

PATRICK DOHAN

THE HORROR SHOW GUIDE: THE ULTIMATE FRIGHTFUL GUIDE OF MOVIES

Mike Mayo
Visible Ink Press

Putting together a horror movie guide seems like an unenviable task. How do you present a comprehensive selection of flicks while maintaining your own critical discretion? Is it more important to adhere to the neophytes or caty the far-out gorehounds? One inspires that Mike Mayo most likely gobbled up these questions in some way as he compiled *The Horror Show Guide*, a book that promises to leave "no grooveside untamed" in its 1000-plus reviews of films from a variety of subgenres and periods of horror.

Mayo is a seasoned critic who has written for and edited a clutch of *Videohug* guides, including this reviewer's personal favorite: *Cult Flicks and Trash Flicks*. The latter habit might suggest that he has adopted the irreverent and fun-loving '80s style for his own collection. Sadly, that isn't the case. *The Horror Show Guide* is a surprisingly sober outing. Mayo utilizes the same detached, blandly observational tone for every film covered here, whether it's *The Shining* or *Troll 2*. That's not to say that his voice lacks authority—his occasional nods to self-referential movie-in-jokes and factoids solidify his status as an observant and knowledgeable horror buff. Still, I wish he'd let himself have a little more fun, especially when reviewing movies such as the stomachily delightful *Return of the Living Dead*, which is dismissed as "too far-fetched and outrageous that this one's recommended to gore fans only." Really, dude? You sound like Roger Ebert—or my dad.

The inclusion and presentation of certain titles may also strike readers as odd. While *Let's Scare the Shit Out of Ya* is undoubtedly a nostalgic treat, I'm not entirely sure that it belongs in this collection, particularly while other notable titles such as *Rings* are omitted (even while its remake, *The Ring*, gets its own generous review). Then there's the Underworld and *Xeligh* series, which are each given nearly a page of synopsis. While it's sad that Mayo is trying to

be inclusive and cut through the predictable genre snobbery that's often directed towards mainstream offerings, I get the sagging feeling that he's as soft as much of a cult lover as his previous works might

suggest. Admittedly, it's easy to tear apart any movie guide on the basis of subjective taste, but I have to take Mayo to task for declaring (twice!) that *30 Days of Night* out-ranks *Let the Right One In* as the best vampire movie of the 21st century. Are you freakin' kidding me?

This is a big, thankless undertaking, and Mayo has presented these titles nervously. But his stoic face and predictable choices are occasionally toothless, and this makes *The Horror Show Guide* a selection better suited towards new horror fans, as it will only ink and bore hardcore aficionados.

AUSON LANG



UNUTTERABLE HORROR: A HISTORY OF SUPERNATURAL FICTION

S.T. Joshi
PS Publishing

Taking his cue from Lovecraft's essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature," S.T. Joshi has delivered his own massive two-volume treatise on the subject. *Unutterable Horror: A History of Supernatural Fiction*. Even at nearly 800 pages—tracking the supernatural aesthetic from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to the weird writers of the 21st century—Joshi's treatment of this expansive genre is all too brief.

In volume one, he examines the genre's roots and its "evolutionary" mixing of examples of proto-supernatural literature (such as the *Gothics*) and authors who only dabbled in the mode. In volume two, he considers the fangs of the weird: Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Lord Dunsany and M.R. James, before assessing the 20th century.

Only two authors are important enough in Joshi's estimation to warrant entire chapters unto themselves: Poe and Lovecraft. He argues that these two scribes in particular asserted pivotal influences on the aesthetic adornments of the supernatural genre (as Joshi defines it). Where Poe crystallized the horror story in the 19th century with his notion of "unity of effect," Lovecraft's philosophical cos-





Edgar Allan Poe

mic terrors later transmuted the word into a viable literary genre.

What makes *Unsettling* horror interesting is that Joshi specifically tracks the evolution of the weird tale, so he tends to cite the innovative writers who propelled the genre forward highest. This isn't a naive catalogue of who bore influence on whom, but rather a survey of the intricate merits of key authors (and works) and their situation in the development of the literary movement — and Joshi is always decisive.

Not all readers will agree with his assessments, which are at times biling, especially his dismissal of classics or reader favourites. Of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* he writes, "It is safe to en-

THE GRIM READER

SHADOWS EDGE

Simon Sturges, ed.
Gray Friar Press



Shadows Edge is a fine collection of thirteen subtle, uncanny tales. A desolate compass in the woods, a deserted beach haunted by otherworldly stories, the legacy of a creepy Russian scholar, a Southern outcast at the end of the world, spidery avatars of strange dimensions and other terrors invoked by these masters of the new weird, including Joel Lane, Daniel Mills, Gary McMahon, Ian Rogers, Lisa Jewell and John Loefer.

DELAN GONKARIGIAN

IT SUSTAINS

Mark Morris
Earthling Publications



In heavyweight *Earthling* Mark Morris' sci-fi novel, *It Sustains*, teenager Adam is forced to deal with the sudden, heart-breaking loss of his mother, with whom he had been developing a secret language.

He is then plagued by dreams, abstract delusions that blur the boundaries of reality, blending psychological horror and supernatural fantasy. Morris guides a picture that is both intricate and chilling.

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PSEUDOPOD ALEXANDER STUART AND SHAWN GARRETT
JANUARY 15, 2006
THE WORLD'S PREMIERE HORROR FICTION PODCAST

POD PEOPLE

By MANTHA J. JAWORSKI

In this 21st-century world of long work weeks and constant connectivity, it's not surprising that some people are too tired to dive into a book come the end of the day.

For them, audio literature has become an alternative method of staying well read, with computers, car stereos and portable media players now doubling as mobile libraries, allowing book fans to harness the pockets of time between work and sleep.

Leading the audio horror band is Pseudopod, the world's largest horror fiction podcast. Launched on August 11, 2006 by Escape Artists, Inc., it quickly found a fan base, ranging between twenty and 45 minutes in length, each episode typically consists of an adaptation of a single work by a single author. Occasionally, micro-anthologies, composed of three separate stories, spanning 500 words or less, are released under the collective title *Fish on the Borderlands*. Known game authors that contribute to the site, which currently draws in roughly 15,000 listeners a week, include David Barr Kirtley, AC Wise, Eugene Foster and Scott Sigler.

Each installment of the podcast begins the same way, with a search through the site's many submissions to find a worthy candidate for adaptation.

"The unsung heroes of every podcast are our slash readers," explains Alexander Stuart, host of Pseudopod. "There's always more stuff to consign, more stuff to be read, and if you want to be truly successful at it...you have to be prepared to drop a story before you've finished it."

Shawn Garrett, Pseudopod's editor for the last two years, weighs in on what he looks for in a tale: "We tend to favour stories told in the first person, which don't feature too many characters and don't have too much structural complexity...simply because such things are very hard to process for the listener in audio, or require too much work from us. On the flipside of that, a story written overly floridly or in agonizingly pedantic, formal English could possibly be fighting an uphill battle...although, if it was an excellent story, such factors would probably just end up being considerations."

Finding the right narrative gets harder when submissions don't follow the site's guidelines,

Stuart is quick to use an 18,000-word historical reprintage piece that was submitted as an example.

"Yeah, just no," he says of his response to that pitch. "The biggest problem we get with [submissions] is people deciding to fire a story at us that's either far too long or isn't really horror. The horror, I've found as a host and a listener, [should never be] exploitative. It's never there for a cheap thrill or a triffling but always in service of the story. You can certainly write something incredibly horrible for us, but [intentionally] horrible thing tends to have context and depth."

Of course, nailing down the story is still only half the work. The next step requires selecting an appropriate narrator to bring it all to life. Garrett explains that Pseudopod has a stable of voice talent they choose from, and that there are many considerations that come into play at this stage.

"Male, or female, or neither, then story setting and region—I like to have authentic accents but, when not possible, performance of those accents is the next consideration as long as it's not cheesy," he says. "Then [there are the] character and plot aspects—is the character nervous or confident, bawdy or reserved, and does the [performance] need to 'sell' some shift in tone?"

The results of this rigorous selection process can be heard on the site's 330-plus jams, some of the most popular of which are Grady Hendrix's *Tales of the White Street Society* about the hilariously bigoted Augustus Mortimer and his Victorian-age forays into the supernatural, Tim W. Bayler's *Coro Keneah*, concerning a faker who is murdered and reborn into a body made of a brain tumour after betraying a client, and Jim Blythe's *Coyote Tales*, which features the eponymous Coyote, a Native American trickster god that torments his victims with lies and illusions.

After seven years of successfully delivering horror and science fiction via its weekly podcast and a 2003 *Pearce Award* win for Best Speculative Fiction Magazine or Anthology Podcast, Stuart's got a lot more conference now than when he first embarked on online broadcasting.

"I'm not terrified anymore," he notes. "Seriously, go back and listen to episode 48's outro, it sounds like Matt Lillard in *Nebraska* when he realizes the entire world can hear him. We've got a lot better at it, not just technically, but in how the stories are written and presented, and I think we've also got a lot more ambitious."



counter a literary work so undeserving of its fame," while the clones of Sheridan Le Fanu are derided for being "for the most part badly told." But it is exactly these controversial comments that make *Unsettled Horrors* infuriatingly engaging and enjoyable read. After all, a critical dialogue with the genre is essential for its survival.

Unsettled Horrors serves as both a detailed read map for readers, and a valuable history lesson with which all

serious students of the supernatural will want to engage—even if they don't always agree with Josh.

BRIAN J. SHOWERS

THE WIDE, CARNIVOROUS SKY AND OTHER MONSTROUS GEOGRAPHIES

John Langan
Hippocampus Press

The Wide, Carnivorous Sky and Other Monstrous Geographies—John Langan's second collection, after *Mr. Gault and Other Uncanny Encounters* (2008) and the novel *House of Windows* (2009)—is characterized by highly reflexive content and a meta-horror approach, in which awareness of generic tropes is joined by the ambition to twist them into something fresh. Most of the tales manage to do just that, bringing about new perspectives on ghouls, vampires, werewolves, zombies, haunted structures, exorcisms and the works of genre such as Poe and Lovecraft.

The best among these is "Tschinokor," a novella in the form of a vivid lecture on colour symbolism in Poe's "Masque of the Red Death." It blurs the distinction between fact and fiction when one of Napoleon's soldiers ends up in a secluded Russian monastery and emerges with a discovery that inspires Poe's tale—it's also one of the most successful modernizations of Poe I've ever read (the wonder it was selected for Ellen Datlow's Poe anthology and for *Best Horror of the Year Vol. 2*).

A close second would be "Mother of Stone," a 70-page novella, original to this collection, about a researcher into "Internet narratives" who is investigating a statue of a decapitated pregnant woman, which leads to increasingly ghastly (and bloody) events. It's written in the second person, with an economy and control of suggestive details worthy of Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood.

"City of the Dog" proves that, like Laird Barron (who wrote the Afterword), Langan really shines in novellas. This one is about a love triangle, a missing beloved and ghoulie in an abandoned graveyard. It is haunting and heart-felt, with a poignant ending.

The titular novella is a fine example of modern vampire fiction with an original (alien?) creature that hovers in a stratosphere-based capsule only to dive to war-torn regions of Earth and freely sizzle itself among the damned.

On the other hand, meta-approach somewhat undermines "The Revel," in which a screenplay meets a lecture on werewolf myths, and a zombie plague lacks bite in "How the Day Runs Deep," written in the form of a Thornton Wilder fourth-wall-breaking play.

Even if a few of the experiments presented here may not be entirely successful, the majority of the novellas work more than enough to showcase Langan as a powerfully rising voice in modern horror.

DELAN OLANJANDIC

LIBRARY: DAMNED

FEATURING: SCARFOLK

Last month, I stumbled upon a strange place that instantly felt like home to my freakish heart. In the fictional enclave of Scarfolk, England, time has been caught in a perma-1970s loop and strangers are routinely warned of the dangers of spontaneous combustion and accompanying strange children anywhere, while also being subjected to pro-euthanasia election campaigning for the elderly. It's an alternate history, in the form of a blog let scarfolk.blogspot.co.uk, in which each entry is either a short vignette concerning one of the town's many macabre happenings or provides an unusual factoid about its incredibly checkered past.

"My initial inspiration was how memory works or, rather, how it doesn't work. Nostalgia, too," says Mayor Mr. Dr. Litter C S E., the man behind Scarfolk. "The mind automatically tries to fill in missing pieces to create comprehensible, complete pictures, even if those images are not ultimately factual. I started with my own fragmented memories but instead of seeking out facts to fill in the gaps, I decided to fill them with material that reflects how I felt in the '70s: afraid, uneasy, unsettled... With Scarfolk, I exorcised my childhood worries."

As far as more tangible inspirations for the project go, Litter speaks of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Russian science fiction author

Vladimir Zisnyavsky. He, as well as the public information files of era and everything from *Marty Python* and *League of Gentlemen* to spooky kids TV shows such as *Children of the Stones*, *Chocky* and *Doctor Who*.

It's easy to lose oneself for hours in Scarfolk (thanks in part Litter's period-catchy original and adapted free found-object art), but even after reuniting, one question stuck with me: what was it about the 1970s that screamed for this sort of treatment?

"The 1970s was a unique decade," Litter explains. "People were finding their feet after the cultural explosions of the late 1960s, so lots of new things were entering the mainstream: new-age interests, for example, and the refusal to adopt the status quo... In the '70s these so-called 'hippy' ideas began to twist and the benevolent, new-age new spirituality quickly transformed into an interest in darker aspects of the occult, witchcraft and devilry, and unexplained paranormal phenomena. Many British kids were haunted by images in magazines of spontaneous human combustion, psychic surgeries, alchemists, poltergeist activity and there were also cheap horror novels with lurid, gruesome covers."

He adds that the '70s in particular were socially bizarre.

"There were still many outmoded attitudes to race and gender and how society should be run, and there seemed to be a continuing policy of using fear to maintain control of both adults and children alike. We were regularly subjected to public information films warning us in very graphic terms of the threat of racism, going with strangers, road safety, faulty electricals, fireworks, playing on railway lines, nuclear war and even, strangely, the horrors of loose rugs on freshly polished floors and daisy daisies. I think of Scarfolk as suburban or municipal horror."

Litter is currently in talks with publishers and agents about transforming Scarfolk's weird mythology into something else, preferably a TV series. It sounds like a damned fine idea to me, because Scarfolk is just the sort of place that everyone should visit... at least once.

MARCOA S. KESTLER



THE FRIGHT GALLERY

EDITED BY GARY PULLIN

THIS MONTH: TOXIC VISIONS

When Stout's talent for conceptualizing and illustrating living dead nightmares has left a juicy bite mark in the hearts of horror fans the world over. Traditionally trained, he's worked steadily within the competitive LA film industry for over three decades, creating key designs for Guillermo del Toro's *Peter Dinklage* and some tented troubles for Frank Darabont's adaptation of *The Mist*. He also designed one of the most memorable zombies ever to shuffle across the screen, Tammie, the goopy, skeletal roller from Ben O'Steen's *Return of the Living Dead*.

Stout was raised in Salt Lake City, ground zero for conservative Mormons, and not exactly a stronghold for horror. His mother, father and brother were all big movie buffs, though—particularly westerns and horror films, which set him on the path to creating his own creatures.

"In the 1980s I was introduced to the classic Universal horror monsters through the Shock Theater TV syndicated horror movie package like kids of other kids my age," Stout recalls. "I couldn't get enough of that stuff—skull can't! Shortly after that I discovered Famous Monsters of Filmland. Linda Perry continued my education in horror. I eventually graduated from monster school, design-

ing my own creatures for films. One of the proudest moments of my life was being inducted into the Rondo Moser Kid Hall of Fame (a horror bestowed by the annual horror-themed Rondo Awards)."

Stout has won acclaim for his vivid, illustrative style—a diverse and heady mix that's one part Frank Rizzo, one part Mad magazine illustrator Harvey Kurtzman and one part Bowie Wright—, with heaps of inspiration from the likes of Jack Davis, Ghostly Graham Legies and the rest of the fabled artists of EC Comics. One of the best embodiments of his style is, of course, O'Steen's zombie classic: Stout's illustrations were central to the look of the movie. His work established

the tone of the film and his clever character designs have a style that melts perfectly with the punk rock aesthetic and attitude that oozes from the script. Unlike Romero's emotionless phoos, Stout's toxic undead are unpredictable and grin with skeletal glee when they chow down on your skull.

"[O'Steen] left I sketched the zombie designs with my very first drawing of him. Then it just became a matter of doing my detailed drawings for the special effects makeup artist, showing the Tammie from different views."


He's also quick to credit the perform-



ance of the man inside the suit, Alan Trautman.

"The way Alan moved brought that character to life in a way that no stuntman could ever do. I always insist on actors in my suits—not stuntmen. Look at Alan's magnificent performance and you'll see why. He is able to move as though his bones aren't connected. Amazing!"

Stout still gets offers from major studios for his conceptual art and has been traveling to conventions to promote his new book, *Legends of the Blues*, which contains 100 portraits of his favorite blues musicians. But fear not, those drippy put-bag creations of his aren't lurking too far away. He also reveals plans for an upcoming self-published book that will compile all of his zombie-related art, which is sure to whet anyone's appetite.

"It will include my Right Reqs [T-shirt company] images, plus everything I drew for *The Return of the Living Dead*, as well as all the images from my two zombie calendars [see above]." 



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THE GORE MET

MENU THREE NEW CHEMICAL BURN ADDITIVES

Gather 'round and say grace — It's time to dig into these new releases from indie distributor Chemical Burn Entertainment.

The first course, *Serious M. Johnson's 9 Days: Whipped, Chained & Tortured by a Psychopath* (2013), is not the adolescent torture-porn epic the title implies; rather, it's a psychological exploration of the dynamic between captor and captive as seen in such films as *Brutal* (2012, AMP133), *The Slender Game* (2012, AMP137) and *Breaking Her Will* (2009).

Tired of being molested, Gloride (Maura Murphy) runs away from her abusive father while hitch-

hiking to freedom, she reluctantly accepts a ride from the quirky Vigil (Chris Schneider). Vigil takes her home, makes her dinner and gives her a bed to sleep in — and then straps a chlorine-soaked rag over her face and chains her up in a barn. He insists Vigil plans to put her through a nine-day ordeal that will transform her from victim to aggressor, so that Danielle can, at last, receive plans from God. She is beaten, left-drowned, and an electronic device implanted in her back that delivers shocks to her spine when she is disobedient, and put through torturous exercises while Vigil calmly exhorts her to triumph. *Necropolis* and *Belva* return.

A film centered on two characters and set largely in a single room demands compelling performances from its actors, and Murphy and Schneider are up to the task. For a project that was facilitated with bare-flesh through Kickstarter, there's a good amount of blood hung about and a few voice-inducing moments.

Those looking for cross-gore and an '80s-style, shoot-in-video aesthetic will find it in Mike O'Mahony's *Sloppy the Psychotic* (2012). O'Mahony stars as Mike, whose sole ambition in life is to be Sloppy the Clown at children's birthday parties, much to the



A menacing zombie from *Bloodline*

condemnation of his unseen parents. After his angrily admonishes a young girl for drawing a picture of a little boy being embraced by a clown with a large erection, Mike/Sloppy is fired by the local clown employment agency. Desperate, he takes to swilling muckys, and attempts to salvage his clown career by freelancing, which ends in humiliation at a mucous ped party. Sloppy then goes psycho, with hilarious results.

Tasteful gags include a hero being drowned in a puddle of his own urine, errant erections, a prop cane being rammed up a guy's sex and out the back of the head of a girl performing oral sex on him, cannibals and a truck, mid-masturbation peacocking. Then it gets offhensive!

O'Mahony is an inspiration to aspiring filmmakers everywhere — he produced, directed, co-wrote, shot, starred and did the special effects here.

The most interesting film in this batch, though, is Edo Togliavini's *Bloodline* (2011), an Italian flick with effects by gore maestro Sergio Stivaldi. Fifteen years after her parents and twin sister were killed by "the Surgeon" — a downright doctor who begins spreading internet aporia after her wife died while in need of a transplant — television news

reporter Sandra (Francesca Fialle) and her cameraman, Marco (Marco Benvenuto), are assigned a behind-the-scenes story on an avant-garde porn film

to be shot on the grounds of the estate where Sandra's family was murdered. Once shooting commences, the Surgeon returns to wreak bloody havoc on his new houseguests.

It wouldn't be an Italian gore flick if it had a straightforward plot, which is to say it's a bit confusing when zombies start wandering around. Those

looking for a return of the Italian film industry to the halcyon days of the '60s, though, will probably find much to like here (including some mangled subtitles).

As with the previous two films, *Bloodline* was shot on digital video, but with a considerably higher budget. Even Fulci clearly enjoyed this level of production value! Stivaldi, who made his reputation with work on classic spaghetti splatter films such as *Demons* (1985), *The Church* (1989) and his directorial debut *The War Wound* (1987), delivers a cold slew of gross-outs, from the surgical gobs of organ re-removal and sundry apocalyptic to the ripped-out threads of zombie victims. As much as this film may appear to be a mash-up of *A Serbian Film* (2010) and *The Human Centipede 3* (Fall Sequel) (2011), it's a beast of unique origin.



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AUDIO DROME

★★★★★ **THE MONUMENTS MEN** (2014)
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REVIEWED BY DAVID JACOBSON, THE GORE MET, MARK B. HAZEN, RICK HIGGINS, AARON VON LUTTEN AND GEORGE NICHOLS



EVIL DEAD

Roque Bano

La-La Land Records

Fans who were wondering how Spanish composer Roque Bano would approach his task of creating some frightening and horrific sounds for Fede Alvarez's terse, visceral reimagining of *The Evil Dead* are in luck, for Bano's work here is successful on almost all levels, presenting a score that strikes a perfect balance between inaudible soundscapes and imaginative near themes. "Don't Say It, Don't Write It, Don't Hear It" and "Demon Possession" strike at a moment's notice with heart-stopping persuasive aggression and screaming wail strikes, while "The Evil Dead Main Theme" offers a nod to the original by providing some scathing melodic piano accompaniment to undercut Bano's relentless reliance on drones, sirens and unsettling, subliminal demonic utterances. It's a terrifying score trip that stands as one of Bano's finest scores to date; it's also the first truly essential horror score of 2013. **GP 4.5/5**



SHE DEMONS/ THE ASYLUM SHE MONSTER

Nicholas Gierke/Guenther Kauer

Moviestars Movie Music

MMH's latest couple of cult scores by forgotten composers is a strikingly different from the more familiar orchestral stabs and frenetic strings

evoking bug-eyed monsters and aliens. Nicholas Gierke's *She Demons* kind of sounds like a lost Elmer Bernstein score, with jouncing pseudo-ethnic rhythms and swaggering brass worthy of an actual safari, and *she-demon* (or demon). The strings are tense with pinched notes and heavy vibrato, and the drama is regularly interrupted with penitence moments and brief bits of warmer thematic material as the score works its way towards a cohesive dramatic finish. Similarly, Guenther Kauer's *She-Monster* is a mash-up of classical (Stravinsky, Debussy) and maybe a little contemporary (Bernard Herrmann, Leth Stewens), but it's also a weird, free-floating mass of eerie and suspense-building passages, interrupted by a fascinating 4-note "oh-oh" motif (it's beautiful, bizarre and sometimes very funny, making this disc both a gem and a guilty pleasure. **MNH 3.5/5**



THE HOLE

Javier Navarrete

La-La Land Records

Following in the footsteps of the late Jerry Goldsmith, Joe Dante's former main composer, Javier Navarrete (Per's *Cabrera*) manages to capture the youthful glee inherent to the filmmaker's small-town sagas of kids who find weirdness within their midst, while also injecting his own modernist sensibilities into this old-fashioned, elegantly crafted orchestral work. Every instrumental nuance is crystal clear in La-La Land's beautifully mastered CD, with many of the lengthy cues dominated by the film's amiable, buoyant main theme and affecting solo fragments that perfectly and succinctly capture teen alienation. Navarrete's transitions from smiley-faced joy to outright

nightmares are equally sleek, yet even when he plunges into dark musical tension ("Walking the Town") there are always thin thematic threads connecting back to the main characters. The score's strong dramatic drive and Navarrete's shifts between melodic comfort zones and churning "danger" motifs ensure *The Hole* evokes more than kids confronted by monsters under the basement floor. **MNH 3.5/5**



THE HAXON CLOCK

Excavation

Ti-Fi-Fi

With an all-enveloping, sometimes suffocating sense of doom, *The Haxon Clock* (a.k.a. *Bobby Kric*) couldn't have a more appropriate name. On this second album, Kric loses the more organic, medieval elements — such as the flute — to deliver new tracks of dovelry for the

digital age. *Excavation* is a black-and-white work of aural unease: processed feedback, ambient ticking and clicking, crackling static, looped samples and various terse, synthetic beats that sound like something has possessed the recording equipment itself. The album builds slowly to the final, twelve-minute track, "The Drop," which introduces touches of Angelo Badalamenti-style transcendent synth, yet the effect is more mournful than hopeful. It's an often breath-taking statement on the finality of death. Listen at the risk of your mortal health. **GA 3.5/5**



BLOOD CEREMONY

The Eldritch Dark

Witch, Blade Records/Pine Apple Records

I've got a disease, and the only cure is more flute! Witch-rockers

MANIC Rob

Wanderer Records

From the painting needs to listen prog-rockers Golden on opening track "Doll," the *Manic* re-mixes soundtracks/longs into a world of deliciously styled, late-night horror movies. This entirely electronic score, by a French musician known only as "Rob" (a.k.a. Robin Coudert, of the band Phoenix), draws from all that's cool in old school horror music — Tangerine Dream, John Carpenter, the aforementioned Italians, etc. — and holds it together with a robo that cuts to read Cliff Martinez's drive soundtrack. There's a fundamental difference between the *Manic* soundtrack and *Manic*, though. Jay Chattaway's 1988 score was minimalist and downtown, basing an otherworldly and bizarre cues to reflect the nucleus of the killer. Rob's score is about much beauty, taking the listener to sublime heights of radio warfare. The recurring theme, "Haunted," is an eerie keyboard refrain reminiscent of Carpenter's work on *The Fog*, while "Whispering Moans" even manages to mine Philip Glass. Though the remake trend is one we could live without, *Manic*-influenced scores for new horror movies are more than welcome around these parts. **AVL 3.5/5**

LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

Ever notice that horror and punk rock seem to attract the same kind of people? Both subcultures are generally made up of anti-establishment types that identify with the underdog. In other words, both groups live a lifestyle towards rebellion. It makes sense, then, that psychobilly—a genre that combines the old-school rebelliousness of '50s rockabilly with modern punk rock—tends to affiliate with postmodern's down-in-monster movies, the kind of films whose original audiences would have been populated by greaser boys and girls, who were essentially the original punk rockers.

Canada has given rise to its share of iconic rockabilly and psychobilly bands, and right at the top is Montreal's The Brains, a group whose image is firmly rooted in both horror and rock 'n' roll badboyism, a theme that bleeds through on their latest album. *The Monster Within* (out now on Slomo Records). The album's first single, "Stay Back," is a ode to anger and rebellion.

"We felt it was a decent representation of the album as a whole," says slicked-up bass player Colin the Dead about the song choice. "It's about bang on skulls, re-ally. The lyrics [singing] it in the streets, fucking in the backseat, doing lots of dirty deeds" are just about being a rotten motherfucker who the ladies wanna get with but shouldn't. "Cause you're just trouble."

As you might guess, the album title *The Monster Within* is a bit of a double entendre, hinting at horror but also serving as a bit of a personal metaphor. "The new album definitely has a distinct theme," says Colin. "I've had a fucking crazy year. Broke up, drinking too much, getting put in the hospital a few times. It's basically about broken hearts, suffering, defeat, murder, booze and women. *The Monster Within* is about the hate and misery that builds in the pit of your gut."

Instead, much of the blood spilled through his and vocalist Rex D La Mueria's lyrics is personal in nature, though they leave a break to spin some monster just as well. Despite its double meaning, the title track is actually a fairly traditional Lovecraft-themed monster rocker.

"We're definitely influenced by Lovecraft to some degree," Colin confirms, "but this album has fewer monster songs than albums in the past. We do save slaying about blood, guts and murder, though. Really I just wrote what I was feeling at the time and magnified it to the point where I'm talking about slitting throats and fucking the dead—ha!"

That said, the album artwork, by our own Ghoulish Gary Pollin, still serves up a huge slab of Ghoulish mayhem.

"Gary did the cover of one of our previous albums, *Zombie Nation*, as we already knew his work was the shit. We just gave him some lyrics and a few tracks and said we wanted a horror folk poster kinda deal and he rose with it."

Check out *The Monster Within* now for a true northern reflection on monster movies and teenage delinquency. **SW:10/10** and **gonzo** eat indicated.

AARON VON LEPTON



Blood Ceremony are back with their signature brand of flute-filled paganism, for their third full-length outing, *The Elotish Dark Most* honore-inspired guitar-driven bands fall firmly into black or death metal territory, using grunts and growls as signs of their commitment to the genre. Blood Ceremony takes more of an Argo route, combining growling, atmosphere, otherworldly jams with the arcane energies of ancient coven coming together. The result is good-times '70s-esque rock, complete with rolling riffs and a rattling organ. *The Elotish Dark* showcases a band of musicians who are comfortable with everything they do, whether it's the dreamy acoustic "Lord Semmerle" or the campfire country rhythms of "Be the Lord of the Wild Siders." Blood Ceremony truly shines, however, when it launches into the Goryman jam sessions that make up most of the album. Put your cloak on and raise a chance to the night. **RH 3.5/5.5**



WARBEAST

Destroy

Housecore Records

The musical roots of the thrash veterans who comprise Warbeast may reach back to seminal '80s acts such as Raging Mantis and Gensacide, but there's no wallowing in any primordial glory on their second album for producer Phil Anselmo's Housecore label. *Destroy* is rife with tracks of unrelentingly heavy and thoroughly modern thrash—with a monstrous twist. Lyrically, the band pays lip service to genre touchstones, as well as politics, in the 9/11 epic "The Day of..." and personal tribulations in generic tough-guy anthems "Epistolar Bastard" and "Nobody." The horror-inspired songs are infinitely superior. "Warbeast" is about a genetically mutated monster, "Nightmares in the Sky" concerns bat creatures that spread terror at night, "Blood Moon" is an ode to lycanthropy and "War of the Worlds" is a poem to H.G.

Wells' famous interplanetary invasion novel. Regardless of what vocalist Bruce Corbett is shouting about though, Warbeast will destroy, annihilate and exterminate you! **GM 3.5/5.5**



THE BLACK DAHLIA MURDER

Everblack

Metal, Dark Records

Melodic death metal warriors The Black Dahlia Murder have reached deep into the horror genre for inspiration throughout their lengthy career, including the cannibal guide Butchering the Human Carcass for Human Consumption, NES game Ghouls 'n' Ghosts II, *Sinner's Quest*, and '80s classic *Monster Squad*. On *Everblack*, their sixth full-length of smooth sonic desecrations, they finally make the obvious choice of penning a track—"In Hell Is Where She Wants for Me"—based on the infamous 1947 case from which the band takes its name. In a particularly nasty move, the song is told from the point of view of Elizabeth Sher's killer as he attends her funeral and admires her body as a trophy. If that's not gruesome enough, "Raped in Hell" by Vines of Thorns' references *Evil Dead*, just in time for the bloodsoaked remake. From beginning to end, *Everblack* is full of bludgeoning riffs, rapid-fire drumming and melodic passages that make almost every track a main-gone anthem. **Rated R for Real** **AWL 3.5/5.5**



IN HONOR OF THE BAND'S LATEST RELEASE
SKINNY PUPPY'S OGRE EXPLAINS HOW TO
WIELD AN ALBUM LIKE A WEAPON

CHAMBER OF HORRORS

by LOISA LADOGUEUR

FOR 30 YEARS NOW, SKINNY PUPPY HAS BEEN MAKING music about terrible things. And while Ventroneer's Kevin "Ogre" Ogden and Glen Key may have started out seeking horror movie dialogue to layer over their menacing industrial beats and stream-of-consciousness lyrics about the evils of such things as animal testing and psychic cults, they've long since turned to creating the scary sounds themselves. In the case of *Weapon*, the group's fourth recording since reforming in 2000, after breaking up five years earlier, they decided to go one step farther: create an album that would not just be about terror, but would itself be a tool of torture.

"The concept came about in 2011, based on the idea of a fan who ended up being a giant in Guantanamo," explains Ogre from his home in the wilderness outside of Los Angeles. "There, he heard of Skinny Puppy being used no less than four times to torture prisoners. So the original idea was to turn an album to torture people by, to make an album into a weapon."

That idea eventually evolved into a record about what the song "Kill!" refers to as "the criminal age" of gun violence and threat of chemical warfare, as well as the issues of environmental destruction the band has been shouting about for years, inspired in part by the Fukushima nuclear meltdown disaster of 2011.

"When Fukushima happened in Japan, I started to look at abstracts as weapons," explains the singer. "We've made a horrible right turn involving the

species. As Einstein said of nuclear power, that's a hell of a way to boil a cup of water. And the sales pitch to the public was that the energy source would be unmined, you'd hardly have to pay for it, and it would be clean. That was the boogymoogle sold to the populace to get a weapons program started. But to the day, it's never unmined."

As you might guess from an album called *Weapon*, there's no shortage of commentary on the gun. But the band doesn't prattle or proselytize so much as pose questions about the state of things. In a spoken-word poem at the end of the track "salvo," Ogre actually adopts the persona of a gunman, as he intones in his preselected voice, "a metal clanging with more rights than we're given."

"I'm the weapon, I'm giving voice to the weapon," he says. "The way they've given voice to the corporation. They give more rights to the metal casings of the bullets than to the victims. So I wanted to personally that."

Seriously, *Weapon* continues Skinny Puppy's tradition of being experimental sounds and dark lyrics with the old pop melody and danceable rhythms. (Well, if you think dancing should look like a cross between having a seizure and trying to stomp out a fire.) But as they've moved away from fictional horrors towards real-life concerns, the band's sound seems more like the soundtrack to a sci-fi action film than a chamber flick.

"Horror becomes more about our senses," says Ogre. "To me, what's fascinating is the visual spectrum, is our perception, which we take for granted as being wide open, [but] is actually really limited. The really terrifying things are beyond what I can see. We've entered a time, we've passed it actually, when the Orwellian or Kafkaesque element of this are perfectly obvious. Nothing is so benign as it seems."

Skinny Puppy's singer has not quite abandoned his lifelong love of monsters just yet, though. Since appearing as *Algal* in *The Genetic Opera* in 2000, he's been pursuing more scary movie acting gigs, and is slated to play a werewolf in Jennifer Lynch's next film, *A Monster Near Dear*, a black comedy that he calls (jokingly) "a cross between *Twilight* and *Requiem of the Living Dead*. One thing is certain, whether playing the tormented singer of an industrial band onstage, a fucked-up character on screen, or just maddening about good senses not, Ogre will always find himself down to the dark side.

"I've been lucky that the dark side has never consumed me. It's actually lifted me up and carried me through a lot of incredibly difficult times. I'm not scared of anything anymore, I've been so terribly scared by things and situations but I've found that standing in the dark is one of the most comforting things in the world." ☠



PLAY THEM

NOW PLAYING > DEAD ISLAND: RIPTIDE, DUSK FALLING



DEAD ISLAND: RIPTIDE

PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Deep Silver

If you're planning a family vacation on Paloran Island this year, you just might want to leave the kiddies and senior ladies behind and stock up on fresh water, a first-aid kit and lots of weapons instead.

Dead Island: Riptide is the follow-up to 2011's zombie kill-fest *Dead Island* (Xbox 360/PS3), and features the same four characters from the first outing, who made it off the infected island only to be stranded on another one that's absolutely brimming with the walking dead.

Joining them this time around is a new playable character: navy cook John Moore, who's as good at hand-to-hand combat as he is at serving fresh browns in the mess hall.

Unlike the first title, this game has a lot of action set in and on the water: there are plenty of flooded areas that you'll have to navigate by boat. There's even a new zombie, called a Drowner, which lurks beneath the waves to pull you down to your deadly demise. And forget about guns; for the most part you'll have to scavenge and creatively rigged weapons to make cool stuff such as flaming axes and Wolverine claws.



Unfortunately, even when you're not completing side missions, which include making barricades and searching for bags of cocaine(!), you'll likely find yourself cursing the game's clunky control system, which makes it impossible to climb over some obstacles or properly aim your weapons at the hordes of gut-munching zombies tearing down on you.

For those folks interested in nothing more than extended periods of bloody mayhem

and uninterrupted combat — this isn't the game for you. But it could be one for players yearning for a more realistic depiction of what living through a zombie apocalypse would probably be like — that is, lots of hours of scavenging for weapons, food and supplies, interspersed with short moments of obnoxious gunz, clumsy melee combat and sheer terror. Next time, you just might want to look that zombie somewhere more hospitable, like the North Pole.

ANDREW LEE



REMARKS: HUMANOID ENVIRONMENTS, CRAFTING, WEAPON MODS, CLOAKING, GIFT KING
MINUS: CLUNKY CONTROLS, BLAGGARDY STORYLINE, UNREMARKABLE GRAPHICS

DUSK FALLING

iPhone, iPad, Android
Autonauts Inc.



Dusk Falling exists in the largely yet-to-be-charted domain of location-based mobile games, which take your GPS locale into gameplay consideration. This may explain why it feels innovative yet incomplete at the same time.

It attempts to weave a complex back story about humans stumbling across vampire activities into gameplay that at times feels wholly divorced from the main narrative thrust — never mind that said gameplay is quite basic. Perhaps strategy becomes much more important later on, when your upstart bloodsucker has accrued more health, but at the get-go it's just a lot of pointing-and-clicking to gather power and convert weaker vampires to your cause without much payoff. It's also worth noting that this point-and-clicking can only be done if you are physically near to your target or you're using your Jinxus Mirror, which allows you to teleport anywhere after gray for 11 hours minus a day. Of course, you can always buy more time if you want to pony up



some real-world cash.

That right there might be the single biggest problem with *Dusk Falling*: everything costs extra, from a coffin to prevent random attacks while you are offline, to the freedom to leave your current vampire clan. These extra charges might work once players are hooked, but *Dusk Falling* is never really that addictive. In fact, the point-and-click attacking and gathering is barely engaging enough to keep drawing us back to the app, let alone enough times for it actually to make a substantive difference in play. What *Dusk Falling* could really use are more player goals/achievements rather than just the ones at the end of month-long "events", so you feel like you're actually getting somewhere. It would also benefit greatly from a much more intricate interweaving of the story with gameplay. Right now, both can be enjoyed (or not enjoyed) entirely separately from one another.

Dusk Falling gets an "A" for effort when it comes to breaking new ground, but the final presentation is pretty average.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



REMARKS: COOL OCCASIONAL BLOOD-SUCKING, REVOLUTIONARY BACK STORY
MINUS: NO ENOUGH FREE CONTENT TO ENJOY, OCCASIONAL DRAGGERS

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CLASSIC CUT

MANIAC

WILLIAM LUSTIG ★ US—1980

Because art is often served to us so tastelessly, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking it's supposed to be pretty. William Lustig's *Maniac* connects that mistake spectacularly—it not only shows us ugliness, repeatedly and unblinkingly, but makes it hard to forget that ugliness once it's been seen. As such, it's a reminder of not only the power of horror, but also of the genre's unique cultural role.

It's a truism to say that art holds up a mirror to society. But in the case of *Maniac*, a gritty, gory tale of a psychopath who stalks, murders and scalps women in New York City, what that mirror captured was especially repellent and unmistakably real. That sense of reality came partly from its use of unflattering New York locations; this was the Big Apple of Taxi Driver (in which star Joe Spinell had also appeared) but rendered even more hellish. Its good-looking lead was exchanged for a homely one, and Bernard Herrmann's orchestral score was replaced by grim synthesizers. In one of *Maniac*'s most notorious scenes, the title character stalks a couple in a parked car; a clear reference to the Son of Sam killings still fresh in the public's mind.

Perhaps not coincidentally, that was the scene that drove critic Gene Siskel to walk out of a screening. "If this wouldn't stop Siskel from later jumping in *Maniac* with every other 'woman-in-danger' film, claiming they were 'all pretty much the same'."

It wasn't the only one outraged, though. Protests took place across the US, and the *Los Angeles Times* took the unusual step of refusing to run any advertising for *Maniac*, explaining that "[i]t is our duty to the community we serve not to encourage even indirectly such violence." Such opponents were reversing the mirror-to-society paradigm, fearing that some viewers would use

the film as an inspiration for real-life violence. And the poster, now a kind of transgressive classic, didn't help matters. With its crotch-level juxtaposition of knife, bloody female body part and discernible excoct, it was natural that the anti-horror contingent and certain feminists questioned

Maniac's target audience. In fact, the poster was deemed so reprehensible that it prompted the MPAA—which actually hadn't rated the film itself—to make distributors submit marketing material's going forward.

Not that the film's detractors lacked for textual evi-

dence. After all, female characters are graphically scalped, their hair used to adorn miniguns in a sleazebag-funny yet perfect literal objectification. Spinell's Frank Zito has trouble being intimate with two women (he has mother issues, to put it mildly), but sleeping with manufactured amnesia is a different story. In one especially nasty sequence that finds an ace in the Alexandre Aja-produced remake (out this month from IFC Midnight), a nurse is methodically hunted in an empty subway station and ultimately impaled in a graffiti-clogged restroom. Granted, it's late at night, but it's not as if the victim is in a sleepy suburb or lonely cornfield. This is America's most populous city, and yet we might as well be in a ghost town. Of course, our schizophrenic protagonist does live in a ghost town of his own mind, one where his victims ultimately take their revenge. It's probably no surprise that a close reading of the film's actual gender politics—including the way that Caroline Munro's character survives her relationship with the titular maniac—can be so easily ignored by non-fans. The impressively pathetic, improv-heavy performance by Spinell hardly makes us want to identify with the killer even as we come to understand his madness.

It's this straddling of pure exploitation and psychological insight that enables *Maniac* to take credit for influencing works that stand at both the apex and nadir of the serial-killer subgenre. An example of the former is John McNaughton's *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986); of the latter, Nick Polunin's *Murder-Self-Portrait* (2014). But what all such films share is an uncompromising emphasis on the killer's POV and his inhumanity. In our real world, the mysterious air of the masked slasher is replaced by a disconcerting intimacy, and any attempts to catch or evade

him are pushed to the background in favor of explaining his psychosis. Nowadays we take that approach for granted, whether it be Chuck Palko's shocking-yet-sensitive strategy in *Ed Gein* (2000) or *The Black Stringer* (2004), or Adam Wingard's *Pop Skull* (2007), with its *Maniac*-like sense of supreme subjectivity, in paving the way for such films. Lustig's classic speaks to how horror allows audiences the freedom to explore the dark and uncanny—but still decidedly human—places where it takes them.

PETER GUTHEBRITZ



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